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CALLED TO ACCOUNT.



VOL. I.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

I Nobel.

BY

MISS ANNIE THOMAS,

AUTHOR OF

"DENIS DONNE," "THEO LEIGH," "WALTER GORING," "PLAYED OUT,"
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

CHAPTER I.

RHYME *versus* REASON.

"Oh! woman's heart was made
For minstrel hands alone :
By other fingers played,
It loses half its tone.

"Then drink to her who long
Hath waked the poet's sigh—
The girl who gave to song
What gold can never buy."

THESE words were sung out thrillingly by a handsome, fair-haired, violet-eyed boy of seventeen, as he lounged on the velvet turf of a well-kept lawn at a lady's feet. It was a luxurious scene, —that broad grassy space, studded with cedars and other trees, and artistically fantastic seats ;

the spacious mansion close upon its border; the lake glimmering through the foliage in mid-distance; the gorgeous beds of bloom at the sides, sheltered by banks of evergreens:—the perfect order and propriety of all these things made it luxurious, and the atmosphere through which they were seen rendered it dreamily sweet.

A hazy, languid atmosphere, in which all things seemed to be swooning away in soft delight. There was a blue bloom about the masses of foliage, and a rich warmth hanging over the flowers, and a tender light bathing all things on which the boy and the lady looked on that gorgeous July night!

She was such a beauty! We have had our interest claimed for so many charming creatures in print lately, who are “rather fascinating than pretty.” But this one was “a daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair.” There was little doubt about the source of the spell this lady flung over the majority who looked upon her. It was found in her loveliness,

without much time being invested in the search. Found in the grand, perfect proportions of a form which was not wanting by the side of the Venus of Milo—found in the great, dark-lashed, violet eyes, and in the thick silken masses of waving chestnut hair, and in the opaque creaminess which overspread her delicately defined features, and in the exquisitely moulded hands and feet. She was the sister of the boy lounging at her feet, and he was a glorious masculine edition of her.

“Oh! woman's heart was made
For minstrel hands alone :
By other fingers played,
It loses half its tone.”

He sang this verse over a second time; sang it with passion and pathos, and a kind of glory flamed out, irradiating his face as he did so. Then his head fell back dreamily upon his folded arms, he stretched himself out still more fully with a sort of drowsy satisfaction, and, looking up into the fair face bending above him, he said—

“Do you think I have it in me to get out all the ‘tone,’ Queenie?”

"All what tone, dear?" She was so like him and so far off from him, that she asked the question in the most perfect faith. He bit his thumb sulkily, and raised the black velvet Glen-garry he wore sentimentally, in order that the evening breeze might trifle becomingly with his hair before he replied—

"All the tone that is in the only instruments worth playing upon—women's hearts."

"You naughty boy!—to talk in that way at your age. Really, Percy——" She paused, because the exceeding beauty of her brother, and the snare it and his impassioned nature might prove to him, struck her forcibly for the first time.

"At 'my age?' Come, Queenie, your idol, Poe, went a good way up Parnassus, and a good deal astray socially, when he was very little older than I am; and so did Chatterton, and so did Shelley, and so did—no, Keats didn't go astray, but he 'wasted in despair' because a woman was fair, and 'not for him.'"

The girl he addressed as Queenie continued

looking down upon him, as he made his animated speech, with a strange mixture of queenly quiet and sisterly admiration in her gaze.

"You are such a dear boy!" she said presently; "I wish you wouldn't cultivate these nonsensical notions; and Edgar Allan Poe isn't my idol at all—only I do like the way he's bound."

"Queenie! if you were not my sister, some of my 'nonsensical notions' should concentrate themselves on you in a way that you would be proud to mention. It's disgusting," he continued, in a half pettish, half laughing tone, "that the greatest beauty I know should be wasted on my own sister."

"I don't think it matters much," she answered, with a genuine air of putting it to him dispassionately. "It's lucky for me that I am good-looking——"

"Lucky!" he interrupted, with a small groan.

"Yes, lucky, Percy," she urged vehemently, "very lucky indeed for us all—if you will only

be a great darling, and do as we all ask you."

She clasped her pretty hands together as she spoke, and bent her pretty head a little nearer to him, and he rose to his feet and looked down at her lovely face affectionately.

"Queenie! I'll do anything for you—you're so jolly pretty; but do care a little to see me something more than a mere merchant—do, there's a darling!"

His pleading, loving manner—the sweet soft stress he laid upon the tender epithet—struck her as being "like Percy"—nothing more. They were set in such different keys, this beautiful pair, and yet they loved each other so heartily.

"A mere merchant?—no; but a merchant like Mr. Pollock! Do be sensible; don't drop the bone of being taken as a clerk in Godfrey's house at once at a good salary, and being a partner soon, for the shadow of making yourself famous by your pen."

"Don't fling yourself rashly into fables, and

make quotations that you're not quite up in, there's a darling !" he exclaimed, laughingly ; "you're so much jollier when you're only beautiful and don't try to be wise ; Pollock and the dear mother have put you up to saying all this to me ; now have they not ?"

" Well, Percy ?"

" Well, I wont have it from you," he interrupted, with a loving imperiousness in his eyes and voice that she did not feel at all inclined to resent ; " I wont have it from you. Let me have the thought of you always as perfectly beautiful and perfectly pleasant ; let Pollock say it all to me—with his lantern jaws."

" Oh, Percy !" she protested, gently, for she was going to marry Mr. Pollock.

" There, now, I don't mean anything against him, Frances—he is a good fellow ; but I don't care to spend my life in making bottles in the City."

A light tinge of scarlet came over her face as she listened.

" We have always been gentlemen," she said,

gently, a spark of family pride flickering up and loosening her never very rigid phraseology; "and it has done so little for us—at least for our comfort—I'm sure we must both often have wished that our father had made bottles in the City."

"What a brute I am to say these things to you, my darling! Queenie, I'll do anything you ask me—if I can. After all, perhaps, I should never deserve the bays, and should always dread the duns, if I did follow my bent; and the making of bottles leads to very poetical and artistic results, by the way: witness Pollock winning you for his wife, and living at such a glorious place as this."

"That's right." She bent forward and put her hand kindly on his arm. "Don't you think it's damp? Shall we go in?"

"Must you?"

"Yes, I promised to sing to Mr. Pollock."

Percy offered his arm to his sister at once, thinking "What a good girl she is! I wouldn't marry a female Pollock and sing to her for the

good of my family." Then they went across the garden and into the house together.

It was not an unpleasant change even from that lovely garden. The drawing-room was long, and not too brilliantly lighted, and carpeted with green and curtained with white. The walls were very perfect: they were painted in arabesques of dull gold and grey, and the latter colour had simply the effect of being the shade cast by the former in a very rare and wonderful manner. Pictures hung marvellously well on these walls; and as Mr. Pollock, the master of the mansion, had a safe taste in all works of art, the walls were very pleasant to look upon.

This master of the mansion was seated in his favourite place, employed in a favourite pursuit, when the brother and sister entered the room. He was on a low chair, at a long sofa-table at the far-off end of the room, busily occupied in mounting some architectural photographic views of Athenian ruins.

By the open window which commanded a view of that lawn where Percy and Frances had

been sitting, two elderly ladies were stationed, with cups of tea in their hands, and much civility for each other on their lips. They were the respective mothers of the bride and bridegroom elect, Mrs. Pollock and Mrs. Burgoyne.

Wherever she was, Mrs. Burgoyne had the first place ;—no exception shall be made to that rule in these pages.

In her youth she had been as grand a beauty as her daughter was now, but colder and harder than Miss Burgoyne ; and now, though the beauty was gone, she was a grand, stately old gentlewoman still. She was dressed severely in sombre black silk—lustreless silk, on the folds of which no light ever came ; but the silk and severity became imperial robes on her, she wore them with such perfectly easy dignity.

For many years she had lived with her late husband, General Burgoyne, in India, ruling the regiments he commanded royally, and making any one very much ashamed of himself who ever

harboured the most secret thought of disputing her will. It was a fixed plan of hers, against which there was no more appeal to be made than against the evolutions of the sun and the moon, that she would

“Reign, and reign alone,
And always give the law ;
And have each subject to her will,
And all to stand in awe.”

But as years rolled on she proved the truth of the saying, that every tyrant is a slave. Her husband died, and Mrs. Burgoyne devoted all her energies to spoiling and sacrificing to her son.

From his babyhood she adored him for the bright beauty that was so perfect a reflection of her own ; and as he grew older she bent the knee before his winning wilfulness. Percy was selfish, she would admit that sometimes. But then he was selfish in such a superb way, and he had such a voice and eyes—both were so fraught with feeling from the soul within.

As his beauty and imagination, and selfishness, and fascinations developed, she adored him still

more. The boy could do no wrong. Apollo that he was, she could but give her consent when he declared in favour of striking the unremunerative lyre in preference to entering the mercantile house of the man whom she made it her daughter's duty to marry—for Miss Burgoyne was very little to her mamma, save a means of bettering Percy's position in life.

The other lady contrasted strikingly with this one who has just been described. Mrs. Pollock was a stout, joyous old lady, who liked bright colours in costume, and was always saying things she need not have said, deprecating wrath that did not exist, giving kindly advice that was not asked, and doing other unnecessary things. She liked the prospect of her son's marriage with Miss Burgoyne, not that it promised particularly well for her happiness or his, or for anybody else's, but because it was to be. She liked Mrs. Burgoyne and Percy principally because they were there to be liked; in fact she possessed the enviable faculty of falling in with every proposed and existing arrangement,

and finding them better than any other could have been.

Mr. Pollock, her son, was a conscientious, plain, tall, well-informed man. On a first introduction there is little more to be said about him. At present he was very much attached to the beautiful girl who had promised to marry him, very well inclined towards her imperious, stately mother and handsome *débonnaire* brother, and very anxious to get his marriage and wedding tour over, that he might return to business again.

He looked up, smiling kindly at her as Miss Burgoyne crossed the room towards him. Other men rose at her approach, she remembered, and her mother remembered it for her. The recollection did not make her hesitate in her movement, or waver in the intention she had formed. She sailed up to her occupied betrothed, put her hand on his shoulder, and whispered—

“Percy has promised me to do what you want—isn’t he good?”

“I’m glad he’s so sensible,” Mr. Pollock

replied, smiling more resolutely than before; "he shall find he has not sacrificed his chimera for a trifle. Tell me, do you like these?"

"They are pretty enough," she replied, carelessly. "I have come in to sing to you."

He rose at once, and moved away towards the piano, saying—

"Thank you. Do sing me the 'Skipper and his Boy.' I cannot hear it often enough."

As she was following to obey his request, Percy intercepted her, seized her hands, and whispered—


"That presently; but sing me the 'Message,' and 'Fly not yet,' first; after that you may sing his humdrum ballad, but give me mine first."

So the "Message" was the one she began with, after the faintest little apology to Mr. Pollock for not obliging him. Then, when she had finished it, Percy remembered several more

that he must hear that night; and all the strains he called for were either very passion-stirring, or very soul-subduing. When his sister had sang all that he asked her to sing, she suggested that it was "too late for the 'Skipper and his Boy;'" and Mr. Pollock agreed with her.

It was a very small triumph; but Percy went to bed that night congratulating himself on having "bowled the bottle-maker out about the ballad, at any rate." It was so hard for the boy to see his vague aspirations melting away under the heat of Mr. Pollock's regard for the worldly welfare of the family, that he grew both unjust and ungrateful.

He loathed the prospect of the life that was before him, if he kept the promise that he had given his sister. There would be no beauty to him in an existence that would be passed in superintending the making and exporting, on a colossal scale, of all sorts of glass wares. He longed fiercely for beauty, and change, and stirring intellectual companionship. He sighed



from his soul to meet with some one whose magic glance might fan the poetic spark into a flame. He panted to inspire and be inspired, in fact, as only bards can. If only "Queenie" would give him all the sympathy a nature such as hers could give, since such loveliness clothed it, he would strive and study till the rhythm of his thoughts arranged themselves in fit form for publication. But Queenie always said everything was "very pretty" when he asked her about it, and never flushed a bit of the inner meaning that he was always finding out. Only his mother gave him sympathy; but somehow her sympathy being more verbal than anything else, failed to string him up so finely as he desired.

"And woman's heart was made
For minstrel hands alone"—

and he who could love woman so well was to be a bottle-maker in the City!

His teeming brain, his fervid imagination, the passionate living love he felt for all that was lofty and beautiful, should not be brought to

such a market. He would make his mother see things in a proper light, and go abroad with him, where their income would answer very well until his muse could command half-a-crown a line; and residence in England might be resumed under glowing circumstances. Satire would be a good vein to open at first, he thought; so he composed a verse at once, but both the metre and meaning bore such an unfortunately strong resemblance to "Don Juan," that he felt self-convicted of plagiarism, and gave up the attempt for that night.

In the morning things looked so much colder and paler, that he once more consented to renounce his dreams of ambition, and go into the City. But he recanted again, and went to college instead, where he had been five years, when the story of his life will be taken up again.

CHAPTER II.

THE POLLOCKS' ESTABLISHMENT.

THE five years which had intervened between his first going to college and our meeting with him again had done a great deal for Mr. Burgoyne. He was a man of three-and-twenty now; and he had gone through a good deal for love and beauty. He had smarted several times, and sung under the smarts in the sweetest and most successful way. In the intervals of pain he had flown about society, and made himself known in the flesh to those who already knew him on toned paper in green binding. As he lived gorgeously, and rather preferred himself to the laureate, many people endorsed that preference; and Percy Burgoyne got known.

Frances had married Mr. Pollock—as was foreshadowed when the story opened. She married him, and was very happy, not so much with him, perhaps, as with her children, and in her house. She was sweet, and serene, and stout, and surprisingly lovely still—so lovely, that Percy got disgusted with most of his loves in the course of a fortnight, because as compared with his sister they were “out of drawing.”

Their house out at Sydenham was quite an ideal place; and when you could avoid seeing the Crystal Palace, there was nothing left to be desired. Percy, though he despised the business which had made and sustained it, did not despise that home by any means; on the contrary, he stayed there a good deal, because his sister was delighted to have him, and because his mother's house was smaller, less well appointed, and consequently rather cramping to his ideas.

For the young poet, who had dreams about marking an epoch in the Victorian era of

literature, was a Sybarite in theory; for his rhymes to run well, he believed it to be needful that all around him should be silky, splendid, superb. His old boyish dream of the beauty that was to wake his poetic fancies into fullest life had not been realized yet; but his harp was very warm, quite ready to strike fire whenever the one magic touch that was wanting was applied to his genius.

The fervour and evanescence of his boyish loves had become a bye-word, if not a scorn, among his friends. His heart was every woman's toy for a time—every woman's, that is, who was young, and pretty, and sympathetic enough to make him think of her at all. He had a habit of going down so lowly and so gracefully, that the luckless objects of his adoration could but learn to like and love him just—as he was getting up again. One of the numerous ideals he had formed always appeared to lure him off the reality, whenever the reality deemed that adoration must speedily culminate in an offer.

Not that he was false; he was only too fanciful. He made no plans, he elaborated no deeply-laid designs about the winning of hearts, which, when won, he did not care to wear; but in pursuance of that system of getting the truest tone out of them, he did create havoc in the hearts of many long before his own ceased to be anything but sound and healthy. He had a genuine artistic love for whatever was beautiful, and he made the mistake of thinking a fair and perfect form generally concealed a fair and perfect soul. Acting on this belief was his principal error. He developed a degree of interest that would have been justifiable and legitimate enough had his belief been well founded; but in the majority of cases it was not so, and he was misunderstood and charged very frequently with having an end in view of which he had never dreamt—in short, he was not a man to form matrimonial intentions in cool blood. When he surrendered it would not be at discretion, but because he would be surprised into it. His warmest feelings were still,

as of old, for his sister Frances—the beautiful “Queenie,” who accepted life, and Mr. Pollock, and a career of comfortable nothingness so contentedly apparently.

It was a remarkably happy, calm, unexceptionable household, that of the Pollocks down at Sydenham. Percy was the sole discordant element in it, apparently—the only thing that did not move on in stolid serenity, like clock-work. When he was their guest, things were just a little shaken out of their course. Queenie was not permitted to enjoy her customary nap after dinner, for instance; nor was the house closed, as was usual, at eleven, for Mr. Burgoyne liked to smoke a midnight cigarette out under the verandah, and he also found his sister’s society particularly agreeable at that hour.

She gave him very little besides her quiet, sisterly, affectionate, uncomprehending sympathy, and her beautiful presence. Mrs. Pollock very rarely talked to her brother. She would listen when he spoke, smile charmingly when he grew enthusiastic over his own verses, look grave and

declare "people to be very ill-natured" when critics hinted that he would do better by-and-bye. Her conversational powers were not great, in fact, but her disposition was perfectly sweet, and her beauty superb. "The name of the women who can talk well enough to interest a fellow is legion," Percy would say, "but the women who can look well enough to do it are not numerous." So their fellowship was a very pleasant one, though she regarded him as a wild dreamer, and he looked upon her as a nonentity intellectually.

"Why Percy can't smoke his cigar and tell you what he's going to do before it gets midnight, I can't imagine," Mr. Pollock would remark to his wife.

"Oh! I don't know; it seems to do him good," she would reply; and in corroboration of her statement Mr. Percy's voice would frequently fall upon their ears at this juncture, raised in some spirit-stirring strain that eventually reached the nursery and produced discord. But Mrs. Pollock never allowed herself to be disturbed by

such trifles. "Baby will get used to it, Godfrey," she would say, when her husband would entreat her to go and "calm her infant, and stop her brother's howling." "I'll tell Percy about it to-morrow morning, and he wont do it again." Which was arguing on wrong premises, for her tone of mentioning this and other things to Percy was so indifferent that he forgot her request, and woke her baby, and kept her up at night, just as though Godfrey Pollock had never spoken.

There was not any very warm fraternal feeling between the two men. Percy believed Mr. Pollock to be a good, honourable, conscientious, uninteresting man, and as such Percy respected, but did not like him. Mr. Pollock, on the contrary, did not respect, and did like Percy. The elder believed the younger man to be weak because he had refused to go into business; vacillating, because his interest fluctuated in people whom Mr. Pollock liked persistently; and wild, because of that habit of turning night into day which interfered with Mr. Pollock's repose

and his youngest child's rest. "Percy will never do any good in the world," Mr. Pollock had got into the habit of saying; "but with those eyes of his, no one can look at him and feel anything but kindly towards him." For Percy's eyes resembled his sister's, and Mr. Pollock worshipped beauty too, in his way—not that he had ever looked for it, or thought about it much, until Frances Burgoyne married him.

The Pollocks were like a good many other mated, but not matched, pairs that are about in this world. Few people, who are given to analysing such things, could have found out from their manner whether they were everything or nothing to each other. They were a pair for whom it was very hard to imagine a "past" unconnected with that thoroughly well-appointed Sydenham household. There was not an atom of romance about their union; not a suggestion of "another" being in the background of either husband or wife. To the best of the knowledge of their most intimate friends, Mr. and Mrs.

Pollock had neither of them ever had a thought of love-making or marriage until he asked her mother to give him Frances, and Mrs. Burgoyne consented joyously for her child.

She was a young, sober, calm beauty, who, without being in the least superficial or frivolous, was not addicted to much thought. He was a plain, thoughtful, earnest, serious-minded man of thirty-five, who gave ungrudgingly almost the whole of his life to the enlarging of a mind that was strong and wide, but not brilliant. There was not a grain of romance in them, or in their union. The great, quiet, grand, rather stupid beauty, young as she was, and wasted as her brother believed her to be, was not the woman to give her husband anxious hours.

Mrs. Burgoyne lived near them, not from any ardent desire for their society, but because Percy liked staying at their place, "The Court," and it pleased his mother always to be near Percy. Mrs. Burgoyne rented a pretty, perfectly appointed little house at Penge—a house that had a garden, which was under the super-

vision of "The Court" gardeners. But the house was too square to suit Percy's views, and the garden was too straight for him to sing from his heart "There's no place like home." Moreover, he liked visiting his mother better than residing with her, for several reasons. The chief one was, that she looked so well when advancing to welcome him. "By Jove! she ought to have been an old Border noblewoman; she would have greeted her king so gloriously if he had put up for refreshments at her castle door," he was in the habit of remarking. His mother's dignity and pride, and selfish inconsideration for every other human being save himself, were all so thoroughly "in keeping," that Percy was never out of tune with them. She was never inconsiderate towards him, and Frances never seemed to notice any of her mother's shortcomings; therefore her brother argued that she did not suffer from them at all.

The order of things which has been described as existing in the Pollock and Burgoyne families had been unbroken for some time, when a

change came—a light one in itself, but burdened with heavy consequences. They had all—Mr. and Mrs. Pollock, Mrs. Burgoyne, and Percy—been abroad for a long trip. When they came home they found that old Mrs. Pollock, who had been installed at “The Court” during their absence, had received a letter, “which,” to use her own words, “lay heavy on her mind.” The letter was from a person of whom neither of the Burgoynes had ever heard—Mrs. Pollock’s niece Clara Dennet.

It was a quiet, clearly expressed letter, they all felt, when it was handed round for perusal. It stated some sad facts in a business-like manner, that was perhaps a little hard, considering what they were.

“She’s my only sister’s child,” Mrs. Pollock, senior, explained to Mrs. Burgoyne, while the master of the house was reading the letter. “I was never friendly with her father or her poor dear mother after the marriage; still, now they’re both dead, and Clara has need to remind me of it, I can’t forget that she’s my niece.”

"Oh, indeed!" Mrs. Burgoyne replied. It mattered very little to that lady with whom Mrs. Pollock was or was not on good terms, or of whose existence she needed to be reminded. So now she simply drooped her eyelids a little languidly, and said, "Oh! indeed."

"Is she young?" Percy asked.

"About six or seven and twenty," Mrs. Pollock replied; and Percy's thoughts ebbed away from Clara Dennet at once.

Meanwhile Mr. Pollock was reading the letter, which shall be transcribed:—

"The Governesses' Home," Islington,
10th ———

MY DEAR MRS. POLLOCK,

I had better introduce myself to you without delay, as probably you have never heard of me. I am Clara Dennet, the only daughter of your sister Helen and Dr. John Dennet. My father and mother are both dead; this you may have learnt from the *Times'* obituary. For the last two years I have been a governess in a

surgeon's family in Chelsea—I send you his card—but my pupils having outgrown me, I am cast on my own resources again—and they are poor. Can you help me to a situation of a kind that I can take with credit? Pray do not imagine that I think I have any claim on you because of our relationship; but I always heard my mother speak of you as generous-hearted, and I need a generous-hearted friend now.

Believe me to be, dear Aunt,

Yours very truly,

CLARA DENNET.

Mr. Pollock put the letter down without a word when he had finished it. “May I see it, Godfrey?” his wife asked; and he handed it to her, and then said—

“Well, mother, have you answered this—this Miss Dennet’s letter?”

“Yes, I have.”

“What have you said—offered her?”

“Well, really, Godfrey, I could only say I had received her note. I was too perplexed

to say anything else till I had consulted you."

He nodded his head absently; then roused himself, as his wife put in, in her soft gentle tones—

"Don't you think we might ask her here, Godfrey? We have so much room, and she is your cousin."

"If you think we had better do so, it shall be done," he replied.

"Frances has the kindest heart in the world," old Mrs. Pollock exclaimed, enthusiastically. "It will be the best thing to do; but I should never have proposed it."

So it was done; and Clara Dennet came to "The Court."

CHAPTER III.

GODFREY'S COUSIN.

MISS DENNET selected an untoward hour for arriving at "The Court."

"Considering the number of trains that run between London and Sydenham every hour of the twelve, she might have pitched upon a more propitious one," Percy remarked to his sister, — when luncheon and Miss Dennet were announced simultaneously.

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Pollock answered; "it saves so much trouble if strangers can begin to eat at once. As Godfrey isn't here to help me with her, will you?" •

Before Percy could reply, Miss Dennet walked into the room, and her boots creaked, and she

said "Good morning" to his sister in a way that effectually crushed all his intentions of entertaining her.

Unquestionably there was nothing in either her appearance or manner to rouse the chivalrous interest of any man in her behalf. Rather tall, with a flat-surfaced figure and a long waist, a quiet manner, and a face the aquiline features of which, though not bad in themselves, were rendered unprepossessing by reason of their bonyness and the tightness with which a reddish slightly shining skin was drawn over them. With all this, Clara Dennet was a very good type of the negatively "lady-like girl" of mediocre society. Mrs. Pollock's unconsciously imperial manner came out in strong relief against that of her guest, throwing the latter still further into that background of common-place for which she was so eminently adapted.

"My brother Percy, Mr. Burgoyne," Mrs. Pollock said, as soon as she had shaken hands with Clara.


Miss Dennet and Mr. Burgoyne bowed to

each other; and the lady comprehended that he was "the poet," and was not well inclined to him from that moment.

"My husband will regret not being here to welcome you; but——" Mrs. Pollock hesitated and blushed—and her visitor awkwardly finished the sentence for her—

"But he did not expect me so early in the day, you were going to say? Oh, never mind; I shall make the acquaintance of you and the dear children."

She said her civil speech with such fawning fluctuations of tone—such company carefulness; she illustrated her words with such set smiles and such an animated show of devotion to the unknown infants, that Percy's small remaining interest in her ebbed away in one great wave. Irrevocably he decided that she was moderately bred, moderately educated, little favoured by nature, and utterly lacking in that mystical "something" which sometimes inclines the heart of man towards the plainest woman. Godfrey's cousin was as uninteresting as Godfrey himself; and, for a woman, this was fatal.



“What a bore that she should have come to mar the harmony of the rich summer days that were still before them,” he said to himself, grievously.

In spite of the rare personal gifts that had been lavished by nature on their mother, the Pollock children were remarkably unattractive. There were three of them: the eldest, Godfrey, was nearly five years; Fanny was three years; and the baby only a few months old. The two elder children were endowed with their father's grave mind and manner, and his patient, plodding, earnest way of gaining and imparting information. Young as they were, they were very oppressive, from a habit they had of asking questions with a little air of not being entirely ignorant on the subject already, and of warning you to be careful how you replied to them. Moreover, they were thick-set, ungraceful children, with big dark eyes, and noses that merged into their cheeks in a fat coarse way, that checked affection being felt for them by any but their nearest relatives.

But the heart of the stranger on this occasion

went out to the young Pollocks at once, it seemed. When they came into the room, each with a readily stretched-out hand, and a painfully distinct "how do you do?" to Miss Dennet, that lady developed a sudden enthusiasm. She kissed them rapturously, praising the beauty they had not the while, until the little flattered creatures clung to her, disregarding their mother's statement, that "it was time for them to go back to the nursery, as she was going in to luncheon."

"Do let them come with us," Miss Dennet pleaded, "or I shall feel that you are making a stranger of me. I'm sure you are one to keep your sweet children with you as much as possible."

"They always dine in the nursery," Mrs. Pollock replied, gently. "Now, my darlings," she added, "go to nurse; she is waiting at the door."

"We never dine with mamma when uncle Percy is here," Godfrey enunciated his explanation clearly; and Miss Dennet's face expressed

more sorrow than anger as she once more shook the fat little hand which Master Pollock extended in farewell.

Her manner irritated Percy. She was not pretty enough, with that hard figure and long face, to "do anything of the sort," he told himself.

"Now be off, my boy, and take your sister," he said quickly to his little nephew. And the children, who were in perfect order, departed with the corners of their mouths drawn down, and their fat noses swelling with grief.

"Poor little dears ; I couldn't part with them for any one," Miss Dennet sighed, as the door closed behind them. Then she slowly denuded herself of her gloves, and untied her bonnet-strings ; and Percy remarked how hard and long her chin was ; and reflected during the luncheon, to which they now adjourned, on the seeming want of purpose there is in Providence ordaining that there shall be so many women void of all charm in the world.

"We will go for a drive after luncheon ; it

is a beautiful country about here. Do you know it at all?" Mrs. Pollock asked.

"Oh, beautiful!" Miss Dennet replied, undulating up and down the syllables. "I admire it exceedingly."

"As if she knew what beauty was," Percy thought; "or was capable of admiring anything with genuine feelings." Her voice acted on the young man's nerves. "If she doesn't get rid of the company tones of Highgate and Camberwell she will soon send me from the house, he thought, as Miss Dennet curvetted through several more speeches, each of which was dictated by an evident wish to please Mrs. Pollock.

"Percy, you'll drive us; wont you?" his sister cried, following him out into the garden after luncheon. "You will drive us in the wagonnette," she added. "Miss Dennet and I will both sit behind; and then we can all three talk together."

He shook his head. "Defend me from much of her conversation. No, Queenie, I can't go

and listen to the regulation remarks in which Miss Dennet will indulge."

"Then I must have the carriage, and do without you," Mrs. Pollock replied, in a disappointed tone. "Percy, dear, do try to put up with her sometimes. I'm sure she is very good and kind; how she took to the children."

But Percy could not "take to Miss Dennet that same afternoon." So the ladies drove out by themselves; and during the drive Miss Dennet informed Mrs. Pollock that she "had seen her cousin Godfrey some seven or eight years ago; but probably he had quite forgotten her. He must have forgotten her indeed, or of course he would have mentioned her to his wife."

His wife smilingly acceded to both propositions in perfect faith.

In perfect faith, too, Godfrey's wife desired the coachman to "take them the prettiest round—in order that Miss Dennet might get a favourable first impression of the neighbourhood."

The plain, unattractive woman, who had settled down upon her thus unexpectedly, was not sympathetic to Frances. But then Frances was so sweetly constituted that she never grew impatient with those in whose natures the colours that complemented her own were lacking. She made up her mind to "get on" with Miss Dennet, and to try and persuade Percy to "get on" with her also. The soft, somnolent nature awoke to the fact of there being something like negligent unkindness in Godfrey's never having mentioned this orphan cousin of his.

"I hope she wont feel hurt. I ought not to have let out that he had not done so," Mrs. Pollock thought; "and I will try to get him to make a great deal of her—for I'm afraid Percy wont trouble himself." Meanwhile, as Mrs. Pollock thought these things, Miss Dennet was wondering whether her cousin Godfrey's wife was quite justified in dressing as she did. "The mother of a young and increasing family ought to be careful," Miss Dennet said to

herself; "I must find out what she spends—a word in season may do good."

Punctuality ran in the Pollock blood, and Frances had fallen into a habit of being punctual in all things wherein her husband was concerned, so they were home in good time to dress for dinner. But it happened that this day of Clara's advent, Godfrey Pollock was late for the first time for years. Accordingly, Percy had time to disburthen himself to his sister of a new fact which had dawned upon him, before the dinner and the presence of the master of the house made conversation general.

"I've been to Penge, Queenie," he commenced abruptly, running up a few stairs to meet his sister as she was descending after dressing; "the house next to the mother's is taken by a Captain Hamilton—a half-pay naval man; you must call."

"Yes, I will; I'm so glad mamma will have neighbours." Mrs. Pollock said this with some reason, for Mrs. Burgoyne had been bemoaning the isolated situation of her cottage

lately, and they did not want her at "The Court."

Percy laughed—"Yes, they're such neighbours that it will be all right in time; but my mother sets her face against them now. The whole family were out in the garden when I came away, and I got half-lengths of them over the hedge."

"Is it large?" Frances asked lazily—meaning the family, not the hedge.

"No; the old fellow and a son and a daughter. The son is a commander in the navy too—the daughter is sufficiently pretty to please me even, and I'm difficult enough."

"Then I know mamma won't like them for neighbours," Mrs. Pollock said, confidently. Then Miss Dennet came down and asked Mrs. Pollock if she "was not afraid of so many plants in the drawing-room—they harboured insects?" And the conversation grew general; and by-and-bye Godfrey Pollock came home.

He came into the room in a bustling manner that was unusual with him, mixing up directions

as to the speedy serving of dinner with the welcomes common courtesy ordained he should offer his cousin. There was no sign, in their salutations to each other, of any previous acquaintance between Miss Dennet and Mr. Pollock.

"I am very sorry," he said, hurriedly, "that I should have been absent when you arrived; but business is a great king, to whom 'nice customs must curtsey,' and I could rely on my wife for making you feel at home." He shook hands with Miss Dennet as he said this, and Miss Dennet sighed and looked down; and Frances sympathized with the soft regret that must flood every woman's heart who feels she is only "at home" on sufferance.

The system of non-allusion to the intercourse of old was sustained during the whole of that evening. But when the house was quiet at last; when Percy's latest cigar was smoked, and his sister was released from her occupation of listening to his account of the "motive" of, and the manner in which he meant to treat a new poem,

— an account which he interspersed with phrases descriptive of the colour of Miss Hamilton's hair ;—when, in short, Mrs. Pollock was alone with her husband at last, she said—

“ You never told me you knew your cousin Clara, Godfrey.”

“ What ?”

It never occurred to her that her husband could imagine her to be annoyed at this evidence of his reserve ; indeed, it did not even occur to her that he had been reserved on the subject. She thought of it as forgetfulness, and questioned concerning it accordingly. But he believed that she had kept her own counsel for the purpose of testing him—that she had seemed to know nothing of it all the evening, in order to see whether or not he would voluntarily surrender the hitherto strictly kept secret into her keeping. So now he answered “ What ?” with a sharpness that had never been in his accents for Frances before.

“ I said that you never told me you had


known Clara Dennet before—I suppose you forgot it.”

He looked at her face as he spoke—there was no cloud of distrust, no glance of detection on the open, unruffled brow, or in the honest violet eyes. It was only due to him that it should be so, for the concealment had not been practised because there was anything on his part to conceal. With a sigh of relief he answered amiably enough now—

“No, I did not forget it; but I never thought of mentioning her, any more than I did of mentioning a hundred other casual acquaintances of old to you; the relationship has been so entirely sunk that I certainly forgot to name her on that score. How did you know I had seen her?”

“She said so herself—and I was so afraid she would be hurt at finding that you had never told me.”

“No; Clara Dennet wouldn’t feel hurt at that,” he said drily; and then Mrs. Pollock remembered the Hamiltons, and gave Percy’s version of them to her husband.



Meanwhile Miss Dennet had gone comfortably to her room. As Mr. Pollock said, she was not hurt at his having failed to mention her to his wife, and she was gifted with that order of mind that never suffers its possessor to be agitated out of the enjoyment of all the material elements of enjoyment. Seven years ago it had seemed to be within the bounds of possibility that she should have come to "The Court" on other terms. But the other terms had never been offered, though she had made it very manifest (as only such women can with impunity), that they would not have been rejected. And now she was happy enough to come as a permanent guest to the Pollocks, under the influence of the firm conviction she had that Godfrey had never betrayed her.

After the fashion of her hard-headed, cool-natured class, she had fallen in what stands for love with some people—with her cousin. They had met in a very love-engendering way. Her parents were in distress, and in some roundabout manner they made the fact known to their rich

nephew. In his methodical fashion he inquired into and relieved that distress. But he did not want what he was doing to get noised abroad, therefore he kept it a secret even from his mother. In the course of these transactions he met his cousin Clara, and was kind and gentle, thoughtful and considerate, to and for her ; and she returned his interest with a still tenderer sort.

She had not been exactly unwomanly or indiscreet either in her manner of showing her affection, or in resenting the scant measure he was prepared to mete out to her in return. But she had been only a touch less than these things—that is to say, she had shown affection which was uncalled for, and she had exhibited resentment which was unheeded. Then Godfrey Pollock had got out of her way, and, as has been seen, had kept her secret.

He had been greatly affected by Clara's appeal to his mother, and he had been even more touched by her acceptance of the offer that appeal called forth. It seemed to him impossible

that the woman who had loved him should come and have to be grateful to the woman he loved, without painful memories swelling up. Proud and practical as he was, there had been something in his heart that made that organ thrill as he travelled down by train from town to town. The woman who had been compelled to "stifle her feelings concerning him" long years ago was about to appear before him as the recipient of his bounty—as one tolerated by his wife! The situation was one that he could not accept other than reluctantly.

But her manner when they did meet was very reassuring. She seemed to have buried her dead, and to have made up her mind to pay a great deal of attention to his wife. "On the whole," he thought, "the arrangement may add materially to our comfort; as Frances says, we have plenty of room, and Clara is accustomed to children."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAMILTONS.

It was a great day for Penge when the Hamiltons took possession of the house next to Mrs. Burgoyne's cottage. Penge Place, as it was called, had been untenanted for some months, long enough for its lawn to lose its velvet surface, and for its gardens to go very much astray. It was a very different order of building to Mrs. Burgoyne's cottage. There was a tone of Italian villa architecture about its south front, where a verandah sat upon flower-wreathed pillars; and this was balanced curiously by a sternly Gothic tower at one end, that had been added by a former occupant, whose daughters wanted oval dressing-rooms

and domains. It consisted of a fish-pond and a grove; and one end of the long drawing-room opened into a conservatory, that was "after" some portion of the invisible Crystal Palace. There was a cupola on the top of the stables, a *circular-de-fine* round one portion of the grounds, and a private lodge round the rest. Griffins reposed upon the gate-posts; stately old cedars, and acacias in all the insolence of youth, were planted close upon the conquest-ground; ivy crept about the plinths of the pillars; and a fair blush rose ran luxuriantly over the Gothic tower. Altogether, effects of contrast were not wanting at Penge Place. But perhaps the strangest thing about it was that it should have been taken by a half-pay naval officer.

The mystery soon cleared itself; and Penge was satisfied as to its new acquisition not being a mere adventurer. Captain Hamilton was very far from depending upon a munificent government for the means of sustaining that state which sober people at first felt no

man who wrote R.N. after his name was quite justified in having taken upon himself. He had been left a fortune lately—a fortune which was settled equally upon his two children at his death.

Mrs. Burgoyne ceased to object to her son looking at the beauty over the hedge when she learnt that Mabel Hamilton was an heiress.

The head of the house was a perfect type of a not uncommon order—a mixture of strong Scotch family pride tempered by professional *bonhomie*, and refined by a thorough kindness of heart and courtesy of manner that had, in the old days of “active service,” made him the favourite of his mess and the idol of his men.

A gentleman to the innermost core—a man who never broke the smallest trust that the meanest had ever reposed in him. Full, theoretically, of prejudices of caste, that always gave way when his humanity was appealed to in the slightest degree. Plucky, proud, pure-hearted—a Scottish gentleman, with a strong savour of

the salt upon him—a sailor, whose family traditions saved him from being “a rough,” though he had entered the navy before it was deemed necessary to educate her officers—a man who was so manly that he dared to seem tender whenever he felt so—a strong Conservative, who never aided in developing that modern Frankenstein, the “Working-man,” by raving about him; but who yet had a kindly word and a small coin for all who went along the wayside begging—a gorgeous old incongruity, in fact, whose faith in God and honour was unshaken after a tolerably tough career. Another example of the wisdom of casting the best blood of Britain upon the waters by way of ensuring the return of a proud preeminence thereon.

Perhaps, after all, the best of the man was unknown to those who never saw him with his children. He had been their best nurse, best rocking-horse, best colleague in cat's-cradle, and co-operator in blind-man's-buff, in their infancy and childhood. And now that they

were grown up, he was simply their best friend.

It was partly love and partly pride that bound the young Hamiltons so closely to their father. He met the views he himself had formed so thoroughly. He had not told them that men of long descent had higher duties towards the world than the men who had sprung from nothing apparently, and then proved by his practice that he regarded the onus as nought. He had not sought to implant a reverence for "their people" in their young minds by means of vaunts of their antiquity, riches, and power, unsupported by loftier claims to their consideration. He never gloried in a blot on the scutcheon, however gallantly gained, or in a bar-sinister, however royally won. It was only the unsullied of their "high-born kinsmen" whose names he sought to make a religion in his family, especially to his daughter.

A beautiful girl, with golden hair and a beseeching face, with sapphire-coloured eyes, that glittered through thick yellow-brown lashes —

sympathetic, sensitive, sweet eyes, that would fill with tears on small provocation, causing the region round about to appear bewitchingly and pitifully pellucid—a little straight nose, and a rosebud mouth, and a broad smooth brow—a countenance altogether with a most winning charm in it, and devoid of all that unpleasant cleverness which inclines observers to the belief that its possessor may “carry too many guns” to be agreeable—a face that, in its tender expression, and the rather full, though perfectly pure oval of its outline, would have served as a model for a Madonna. Withal, a well-grown young lady, not large enough to be majestic, or slight enough to be a sylph, but a fine quiet piece of perfectly healthy still life, and yet not inanimate.

“Ladies first,” otherwise her brother would have been introduced before her, as the rights of seniority were his. A young edition of his sire, with a little of the mere social veneering that circumstances had denied to the veteran, with a very fair face, and wonderful yellow hair and

moustache, Claude Hamilton, though he was a commander in the navy, and considerably past his majority, still looked such a mere boy that strangers invariably imagined him to be either much younger or much less experienced than he was. The clear unshrinking glance of his wide open light-blue eyes, the careless wave of his curling yellow hair, the ease and freedom of every gesture, all seemed to mark Claude Hamilton out as a gay professor of the creed of devil-may-careishness. "He's a sort of bonnie butterfly," his father would say of him; and even his father did not comprehend the intensity of each feeling that flitted across the as yet unburdened bosom of the bright, laughing, high-spirited son, whom he still dubbed "that boy Claude."

The change in their circumstances had been very recent—the fortune had only come to them within the last year—and they had done nothing in haste in consequence of it. It was Claude's wish that they should come to England—Edinburgh had been their home pre-

viciously—and pitch their tent near to, but not in London. So Penge was the place they finally selected, Mabel having a touching desire to know more of the Crystal Palace—a desire that came from her having a very slight acquaintance already with that colossal bore. And so they took Penge Place, and soon became of great account in the neighbourhood, quietly as for a time they seemed disposed to live.

The Pollocks were amongst the first group of callers—"really more for Percy's sake than our own," Mrs. Pollock explained to Miss Dennet, who accompanied them on the occasion; "Percy sees them out on their lawn as he comes away from mamma's at night, and mamma wont call; and Percy says that if I do not, he shall be obliged to make his horse throw him and get carried in there."

"Those Scotch people stand on their pedigrees a good deal, and don't like knowing any one in trade, I have heard," Miss Dennet replied, pleasantly; and for a moment Mr. Pollock was not sure of whether he was angry with his wife for

having called it forth, or with his cousin for having made the remark. There was a painstaking acidity about many of Miss Dennet's speeches that frequently made him rouse himself and wonder "whether Frances was quite considerate to her?—poor girl!"

General Burgoyne's daughter—the girl who had once said so simply, "We have always been gentlemen; I'm sure we must often, both of us, have wished that our father had been a bottle-maker in the City"—was not made of the stuff that ever winces under a blow from a dull weapon. So now, when Miss Dennet expressed a doubt as to the Hamiltons being amenable to this merely courteous advance, Frances only laughed and appealed to her husband.

"They must please themselves—we only do it for Percy's sake, do we?"

Then before Mr. Pollock, quite appeased now, and certain that it was Clara who had raised his wrath, and not his wife—could reply, Miss Dennet remarked, "What a devoted sister Mrs. Pollock was—quite ideally so; few ladies, when

they were married and had children, found that they could bestow so much time on their brothers."

Do not we all know those lines?—have we not all experienced the frightful truth they contain when brought into intimate communion with some woman who is (perhaps) always putting us in the faulty position:—

"She speaks, behaves, and acts just as she ought,
But never, never reached one generous thought."

Unimpassioned, cool, and conscientious, it would only have been more difficult for her to sympathize with an erring sister, than to have erred herself.

She had erred a little, though, on this occasion—erred, not morally but mentally. The Hamiltons met the Pollocks in a way that inspired Mr. Pollock with the thoroughly Anglican notion of making up a dinner for them directly. "It will be the best means of making Percy known to them," he said affably to his wife; and she agreed heartily to the proposition, be-

cause mamma still refused to be neighbourly to her neighbours, complaining grievously of their croquet playing and singing, the sound of which smote upon her ears at night, whenever she saw her son.

"Her voice is like a peacock's," she said to Percy; "no cultivation and no brilliancy;" and Percy accepted his mother's statement relative to Miss Hamilton in silence, and longed to hear her and judge her for himself.

He was more dutiful than ever to his mother at this epoch. Never a day—scarcely an hour, indeed—was allowed to pass without his going over to Penge on some little kindly mission. It was the best he could get at present; still, he was fain to confess to himself that it was but unsatisfactory work passing the casket constantly and never getting a good glance at the jewel! He had rarely been so impatient for anything in his life as he was now for the Pollock dinner to come off and make him acquainted with the Hamiltons.

On the afternoon of that day of the party he

came out from his mother's house, where he had been lunching, as was usual with him now, and strolled down the little side-path that was only separated by the compact privet hedge from the grounds of Penge Place. It was a bright, richly coloured October afternoon; the warmth of its hues seemed to enter into the young poet's veins, firing them to a quicker flow as he strolled along.

"Heavens! how full of beauty it all is!" he was just saying—meaning "the world" by "it all;" and then, before the words had faded from his lips or the sentiment from his soul, a soft, tremulous, contralto voice rippled out a melody, the sound of which chained him to the spot.

They were his own words. He knew that they had been composed and published; and he had heard from their composer, who gave it on the authority of the music publisher, that they had been "remarkably unsuccessful" from the selling point of view. He could but marvel at that fact now—hearing them, as he did, for the first time from a woman's lips!

"She sang them as if she felt them," Percy Burgoyne muttered to himself, as he went back to "The Court" only just in time to dress for dinner, for while the songstress had remained in the garden he had been riveted to the other side of the privet hedge. "Can she have been through any business of that sort yet?" Then once more he reminded himself that

"Woman's heart is made
For minstrel hands alone,"

and accepted that fact as a far more probable solution of the tender sympathy with which Mabel Hamilton had sung that strain—of his!

"Mamma has agreed to come, after all; Godfrey will take her, and you must take Miss Hamilton, Percy," his sister said, meeting him near the drawing-room door that night. "Will you give your other arm to Clara?" she added, in a whisper, and he whispered a very decided "No" in return. Then he was introduced to the Hamiltons, and at once made up his

mind that Mabel was as "sweet" as her voice.

They were a very small party. Claude, the son, had not been able to get away from Woolwich that night: so the table was too small and the conversation too general for Percy to strike any vein of peculiar interest to himself with the girl who had given his song a melody even he had never believed that it could possess. But later in the evening, after she had sung an apparently endless Scotch ballad with an interminable refrain, he saw his opportunity and seized it.

"Will you sing that song you sung in the garden this afternoon?" he asked, in a very low voice, and Mabel smiled most amiably, but puzzled him by asking "Which?"

"It's evident that the poor fellow who writes the words never gets a thought," he said to himself, as he replied, "'The Golden Past,' I think it's called."

"Oh! 'The Golden Past!' Yes, I would with pleasure, only that's Leo's song; and

as she is coming I must leave her her own."

"Does she always leave you your own?" Percy asked laughingly, as he looked down upon the golden-haired Miss Hamilton. She had paused, her hands just resting on the keys, and was gazing up at him frankly. She nodded assent and answered—

"I have never had anything that she cared to take; but even if I had, Leo would keep off from even looking as if she'd like it."

"And who is Leo, Miss Hamilton?"

"My friend, Leonie Geneste;—she will be my sister some time or other, for Claude is engaged to her. She is coming to us at Christmas. Now what will you have, Mr. Burgoyne?—or do you only care for 'The Golden Past?'"

"The golden present would reconcile me to anything," he said, in a low voice. "Sing 'All that's mine is thine, lassie,'—I don't know its name."

Then she blushed—and sang it.

CHAPTER V.

UNDERMINING.

MISS DENNET sank into the Pollock household very easily—so easily, indeed, that it would have been hard to say when and where she began and left off amalgamating with them. She was completely one of the family, with a regular round of well-recognised duties and responsibilities, before a more sensitive woman would have rid herself of the first fresh bloom of visitorship. It would have been a curious and repaying study to any one with time and inclination for the task, to watch the way in which she made arrangements essential in the domestic economy of the Pollock *ménage*, which had never been considered so before. It would be falsifying

facts to say that they were happier than before, but decidedly they were more comfortable in a clock-like way, that on investigation would have been found to be due to Miss Dennet.

Hitherto it had been a lavish, careless, pleasant, straggling sort of establishment—a house in which two or three more or less any or every day of the week, makes no manner of difference. Mr. Pollock's allowance to his wife for housekeeping was made on a liberal scale; and Frances had been wont to spend all the money and keep no account of how she spent it—a style of living which perfectly satisfied her husband, since she never wanted more at the end of the quarter. But Clara Dennet, by way of saving her hostess trouble, as she averred (and meant), began to prove the expenditure lavish by keeping accounts, until finally Frances, who was “not strong enough for figures,” as she herself said, half-handed the reins she felt to be slipping from her grasp into that of Miss Dennet.

She was remarkably undemonstrative, this

young woman with the bony features and the hard, dry, red skin. Still, through this mantle of reserve which she wore, it did sometimes seem to Godfrey Pollock that she had his interest and the interests of his children very much at heart. It was not only, he observed, in this minor matter of housekeeping that she toiled incessantly, without hope of other reward than the approbation of her own unspotted conscience ; but she had the active commercial mind on a broader scale—she was always on the alert to see where the thin end of the wedge of a speculation might be driven in successfully for his business. True, she did it all in a hard, painstaking way, that robbed her suggestions with about as romantic a halo as one of his own clerks would have given it. But her doing it at all proved that she thought of him and his kindly and considerately.

Unquestionably she was a woman eminently desirous of doing her duty ; the worst of it was that she conceived it to be her duty to prove practically that Mrs. Godfrey Pollock was

not perfectly discharging hers. It can hardly be said that she either lectured Frances, or pointed out that lady's shortcomings to her lord. But she (Clara) did say enough to Mrs. Pollock to bear up the statement to Godfrey of Miss Dennet having "felt it behoved her to speak about what she couldn't consider quite prudent."

She said it all so plainly and curtly that Godfrey Pollock never imagined himself to be listening to censure of his wife.

"Mrs. Pollock belongs to a different class to ours," she said, in conclusion. "What we are accustomed to rank as duties she has never been taught to consider at all; we can't blame her."

"Certainly not; but why do you never call her Frances, Clara?"

Miss Dennet reddened a little.

"Your wife is entitled to all respect from me; and she shall have it always, Godfrey," Clara replied, in a tone that seemed to imply that Mrs. Pollock might be expected to do

something shortly which would lower her in the estimation of less forbearing Christians than Miss Dennet. "Any woman you had married would command that at least from *me*," she added.


And again the veiled flattery to himself caused Godfrey Pollock to forgive the slight slur on his wife.

There was unmistakable feud between Mrs. Burgoyne and Miss Dennet. The former lady regarded the introduction of the latter as a direct violation of the tacit treaty which had been entered into by her son-in-law and herself on his marriage. She had accepted him, Godfrey Pollock, as her daughter's husband, and because Frances could not have become Mrs. Pollock without him; but she had not bargained for being brought in contact with more of his race. The correct, carefully-conducted, and properly-minded young woman who had come to "The Court" without a permit from Mrs. Burgoyne, had need of all her caution, for if she once slipped ever so slightly,

and it was perceptible to Mrs. Burgoyne, that lady would give her antagonist a fatal fall.

For all her fawning, fluctuating voice, and for all the intense actual truthfulness of her words, Miss Dennet rarely said agreeable things. The truths she told were never sweet, but they were terribly incontrovertible, which again put others in the wrong, and herself in the right, on most occasions. It was not her fault that Percy spent more time in dreaming than doing; it was not her fault that Mrs. Burgoyne was a proud, arbitrary, selfish old lady, with a total lack of consideration for every other human being save her son; it was not her fault that Mrs. Pollock was only a beautiful, quiet, gentle-hearted lady, very much averse to all exertion, mental and physical. None of these things were her faults—the faultless creature!—she only regretted that such things were—to Godfrey.

How did it come about? How do such things ever come about? With a bitterness of spirit that he abhorred himself for feeling, it came to the patient, plodding, unimaginative, conscien-



tious man of business to believe that he had made a mistake in marrying the woman he had married, and in leaving the woman he had left. There was nothing in the latter that was pleasing to the eye or soothing to the taste ; there was not a touch of fascination in her voice, or " way," or manner, or expression ; she lacked loveliness ; she was too passionless to inspire passion ; yet, for all this, Godfrey Pollock found himself feeling that it would have perhaps been better for him if he had succumbed to the interest she had in him and his welfare seven years ago. They were both hard as flints ; but the striking of flints together will produce fire.

They both seemed and were hard as flints, too, in their manner to each other. None of the softnesses and fooleries of furtive glances or low words, were ever indulged in between them. He called her Clara, and she called him Godfrey, with about as tender an intonation as they would respectively have employed in mentioning Adam or Guy Faux. But she made up for the restraint which, perhaps, even she had to exercise over

her affection for him in lavishing it on his children. The sight that greeted him regularly as he entered the nursery, on his return from town, was Clara, seated on a low chair by the day-nursery fire, with the baby on her lap, telling fairy tales to the two elder children. It did not occur to him that perhaps Frances had been devoting herself to them all day—he saw Clara doing it now. He knew what he saw, and imagined both less and more, in fact; and Clara Dennet went on telling her fairy tales very steadily.

“When first I saw thy favourite child,
I thought my jealous heart would break;
But when the unconscious infant smiled,
I kissed it—for its father’s sake.”

Babies would frequently be “taken down” a good deal in their own estimation if they could fathom the truth.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS GENESTE.

THE young lady who had been mentioned by Mabel as "my friend; she will be my sister soon," had in reality no claims of kindred on the Hamiltons. She had been left to Captain Hamilton's guardianship six years before the opening of this story, and treated like his daughter during the period; and she had grown very close to the hearts of them all; but she was of another stock altogether to theirs.

Miss Geneste had not been born and cradled in peace and plenty. The child of a runaway marriage, her mother's people ignored her existence; and her father, though well-born and well-bred, had really no family to whom he

could apply for protection for his little girl when her mother died, and his ship was ordered on foreign service. So he sent her to stay with his old shipmate, Captain Hamilton ; where she still was, when the news came home from the west coast of Africa that Commander Geneste had died just at the expiration of his five years' servitude.


When the man who, twenty years before, had run away with the flower of the Greville flock died, the rest of the Grevilles held out the olive-branch vicariously to him by seeking and finding his daughter ; and she, in whose heart bitterness had no place, dried her tears with one hand and grasped the branch with the other, and went off hopefully to visit the cradle of the race which claimed her for one of them at last.

This all happened about a year before the Hamiltons took Penge Place—before the fortune had been left to them, while Claude was only a commander in the navy, with no valid right to think of asking Leonie Geneste to share his pay with him. So he had only bidden her farewell

with a very violet tinge of sorrow round his blue eyes, and asked her not to "quite forget him." And she had promised not to do so in the kindly, frank, generous way that only a woman not a bit in love can speak and promise things that sound sweetly, and mean nothing. But all their sweetness, and all the fulness of what they might mean came back to him when fate favoured him in the matter of the fortune.

Leonie Geneste had been away from her home—as she called the Hamiltons’—a few months when this happened; and she had rejoiced and congratulated herself and them on it, as Mabel might have done, when Captain Hamilton sent her the good news. They were far dearer to her than her mother’s people; she did not know how dear until these latter suggested, when Claude proposed, that “unless she accepted him she could never go back to the Hamiltons again.”

It was a very easy alternative for the girl, who did not love any other man, and who had been affectionately fond of Claude for six years.



She did accept him without any demonstration of tender emotion, but with a frank declaration of being very glad to do so, and to have the opportunity offered her of getting away at once and for ever from the overwhelming, solemnly oppressive affection which the Grevilles offered her by way of compensation for the neglect they had lavished on her mother. They liked her now that they knew her—liked her for the gay trustfulness with which she responded to their advances, that mingled with a certain carelessness as to whether those advances were made or not, and rendered her manner fascinating.

As she was a difficult woman to deal with in real life, so she is hard to describe in writing. She had that which Arthur, the weakly-pliant, lacked; and Guinevre, the weakly-susceptible, longed for, "warmth and colour." She was intensely "something" that the men who loved her called "beautiful;" and the women who did not like her called "peculiar." It was not perfect beauty by any means: the rather low

brow, and the straight, stick-out nose, and the half-pouting, half-smiling mouth, were all wide astray from classical models; but there was dazzling beauty in the great grey eyes, with their long dark-brown fringes—gorgeous beauty in the hair, that would have been black had it not had ruddy reflections in it—something more bewildering than beauty in the glorious smile that flashed out like a sun-burst over dimpling mouth and crimsoning cheeks when she was pleased.

There was rare beauty in her form, too—in the straight throat set far back and the luxuriant fall and fulness of the lines beneath it. Rare beauty in the supple waist and in the sway with which she carried herself—rare beauty in the long slender limbs (some way, though she was not very tall, her limbs were “long and slender”); and in the exquisitely shaped tiny feet and hands; and above all, rare beauty in the way she carried all these charms. There are thousands of women whose beauty is equal to, and even far superior to hers; but Leonie Geneste had that

indescribable something which cannot be analysed or named. It is more than fascination—it is the power of casting a spell which has more of witchcraft in it than anything else. The women who possess it are never “loved little and long,” as Charles Reade’s heroine was meekly contented to be; they are loved madly, and never forgotten. The mere memory of them has the power of putting out the light of their paler successors in a way that makes one pray never to succeed them. They need not do anything definite as a rule—they “are,” and that is enough for their adorers.

The strong, bright, joyous nature of the girl had been subjected to very few depressing influences as yet. She had loved her father while he lived, but during the last five years of his life he had been a long way off to be loved; and her affection for him, though it had not exactly waned, had decidedly not deepened. She had cried when he died, but her tears had been dried by the necessity of helping Mabel Hamilton to pack her trunks towards a visit to the Greilles;

and then she had got to the Grevilles' and been treated as a beautiful surprise, and made very happy.

The one unfortunate incident of her visit—the only thing which reconciled old Mr. and Mrs. Greville to their grandchild leaving them again—was that their heir, another grandchild, who was engaged to a most unexceptionable heiress, whose estates marched with the Grevilles',—found his betrothed a bore by the light of Leonie's eyes, and grew very unhappy. The dawning of his misery had been far from unpleasant to Miss Geneste; but at length, as his honour pulled him one way and his inclination another, gratified vanity gave way to some very real feeling, and Leonie bowed the head meekly beneath the grand parental wrath which woke at the possibility of the overthrow of a scheme dear to them, and left off listening with pleased, proud, happy eyes to her cousin's statement of how intolerably dull he found every other woman after an hour with her.

However, before that return to the Hamiltons

which Mabel had foreshadowed in her conversation with Percy Burgoyne, Mr. Greville "had it out" with his cousin Leonie, and the sweet veil of half-doubt no longer hung over the affair. He had been away for some time, and on his return he was met by the news of "Young Captain Hamilton" having made an offer to Leonie, which she had accepted. Being an engaged man himself, he had not the slightest right to feel aggrieved at this. Nevertheless the news sent his heart down, and he went to look for Miss Geneste in the park soon after, with a feeling that if a bull in an adjoining pasture (which had with much labour and difficulty gained the reputation of being fierce), should take it into its head to gore him, it would perhaps be better on the whole. However, the bull held a different opinion; so Mr. Greville met his cousin presently, with no signs of a conflict upon him.

She was on horseback, and when she came up to her cousin the suggestion sprang from both their lips simultaneously that they should send

the groom home, and that Mr. Greville should walk by her side.

"I have much to say to you," she said, bending down and putting her hand in his as he stood on the off-side; and he looked up at her and replied—

"And I have much to say to you, Leo," and groaned in spirit as he remembered that his betrothed had the proportions of a camel, and always looked out of drawing on horseback, and that—he could not help himself.

They turned down a long, lovely glade in the park, she holding her reins double-handed by way of impressing him with the effort it cost her to suit her mare's pace to his,—with a little air of queening it over him, an air which women insensibly adopt when on horseback to any one who walks by their side.

Presently he spoke—

"I hear you are going to leave us?"

"Yes—for a time: have you heard the rest?"

She glanced down at him as she asked it, but

his hat was pulled well on his brow and she could not catch the expression of his face. She was very fond of him—fond as she would have been of a brother. “Blood is thicker than water,” one is always apt to remember in the case of agreeable relatives. It pained her now to see his pain—just before she was going away to be happy and marry Claude.

“I have.” He almost whispered it; and she felt that she had been wrong to send the groom home, but that as she had done so she had better make the best of the position.

“Shake hands and wish me joy, Fred.—I’m coming back to be married from here, you know.”

The latter part of her sentence was intended to be consolatory, but Mr. Greville seemed far from being consoled.

“Grandpapa was saying this morning that, if Ellen will agree to it, he would like us all to be married together.”

“Ellen” was Miss Bracebridge—the lady whose union with the heir of the Grevilles had

been so satisfactorily arranged by their respective families.

"I couldn't stand it!" He said it vehemently, putting his hand on the bridle as he spoke, and bringing the mare to a dead stand-still. "Don't be frightened, Leo," he went on, more quietly, "but I *couldn't* stand it: I would rather go and tell poor Nellie the truth, if it came to that."

"What truth?" she faltered. She guessed it more than half already, but she felt constrained to say something.

"What truth?" he repeated, reproachfully; "why, you have made me love you, Leo! Don't think I blame you for it, my sweet!" he added, passionately; "how could you suppose I was going to be fool enough to let myself dream of a happiness I knew I never could have? But I'm awake now," he went on, dejectedly, "and I can even wish you joy,—but don't think I can be at your wedding or marry the same day."

"It was only grandpapa's wish," the girl

stammered ; " and I thought, as Ellen and I are very good friends——"

He loosened his hold of the reins and indicated to the mare that she might move on by patting her neck.

" Good friends," he echoed ; " yes, that's the way you put it, I suppose ; you were not to know that you have been such a ' friend ' to Ellen that having known you I would as soon cut my throat as marry her—and she wont know it either. You're fatal, Leo," he added, bitterly ; and then he suddenly softened as Leo almost gasped for breath, and said, " My darling ! I'm a brute to say these things to you ; but your spells, you great enchantress, have been too many for me. You have made my life a hard one henceforth."

" Don't say it—don't think it !" she broke out ; " you make me miserable—I, who would do anything for you."

" You shall do this, then," he said, gently taking her hand, " let me keep away from you ; never second the old people when they propose asking me to come home."

"Then you'll go away?"

"Yes, I shall go away, the devil knows where, for I don't. Forget all this—you must forget all this—will you, Leo?"

"If I do, shall I not forget that I am not to want to see you, and not to second them when they want you to come?"

"You will be the sweetest memory of my life! *How* can I ask you to forget me, Leo! Pain I would bear—double this amount of pain—for the pleasure of having known you and loved you as I never can love another woman." Then he checked himself abruptly, asking, "Why did he tell her this, when she was so cold that she didn't care to hear it; her heart must have been stone," he said, "or she would have done something to save his from aching so horribly."

"What can I do?" She spoke so warmly, so sweetly and gently, that he forgot "it was her nature to." "Your honour and your heart I thought—hoped—were pledged before."

"Honour! would it be honourable of me to

take a woman and chill the best out of her by letting the fact that I can't kill crop up?—that I love you better than I can even pretend to love her? It's all very well for you, Leo, to argue and defend the right; you don't love me," he gnashed out, with an appreciation of the truth; "you can easily renounce what you don't care to take; but what of me? I'd give up half my life to have you the other half of it; but you don't feel that, and so can talk of my 'honour.' "

"It must be as you say," she said, taking the hand he had again grasped away from him. "I don't feel that, or I'd offer to do it."

And then Miss Geneste twisted her horse round, and galloped home.

CHAPTER VII.

A P E A C E O F F E R I N G.

It had been very hard for Miss Geneste to go down to dinner that evening after her interview with her cousin in the park. After the manner of women, she believed a little too much of what Mr. Fred Greville had said to her. He had announced his willingness to give up half his life, provided she would share the other half with him ; and he had "declared that he never could love another woman as he loved her." All this seemed sad to her, since she could not share his life, and he would be compelled by social bonds to pass it with the lightly esteemed Ellen, and she overrated Mr. Greville's agonies, and disliked going down to dinner.

But her conscience grew lighter and her spirits rose when she did go down. Fred Greville had been very much in earnest in what he had said while he was saying it; but common sense, to say nothing of conventionality, forbade any sacrifice of the sort. As he dressed himself the only portion of his part of the conversation that he did not wish unsaid, was his request that Leo "would forget it all."

So during dinner all its influences strengthened his good resolutions. Happy, successful, well authenticated love may have a good appetite, but despairing love must not be hungry, and Mr. Greville was. Leonie began to feel that she had wasted a good deal of emotional sympathy on a man in very good case; and so, according to woman's wont, she went to the extreme edge of the other view of the matter, and doubted him altogether. He even accepted his grandfather's suggestion about the double marriage on the same day, and seemed to think it a good one. And Leo, in her surprise at this, did not see the little imploring, deprecating glances

which he kept hurling at her, for he was conscious of the calm which had succeeded the storm, and he could but wonder how it would strike her.

It was all natural enough, only she was inexperienced and not prepared for such contradictions yet. Society demands that a man shall not publicly announce his willingness to play false, lenient as it is to the fact of his doing so. Besides, as has been said, he was hungry, and also he was conscious that, let what would be, he must marry Miss Bracebridge. It was just as well, therefore, not to suffer the faithful retainers who were serving him to perceive that he would very much rather marry some one else.

But when he went into the drawing-room, after a great deal of claret, "love was the lord of all" with him again. Leonie was singing, and Leonie sang very sweetly, and he was very amenable to sweet sounds. There was nothing irritating or untrustworthy about Miss Geneste's voice. It came out in great waves of melody, and her face was never distorted the while. His

heart ached about her again, and he got very close to her by the piano.

The old people were very sleepy—dear old people! how their grandson loved them for it on this occasion. This girl, who was singing heart-stirring, soul-subduing songs, with a thrilling fervour that proved she could feel all she expressed, would surely accept his temporary allegiance. His dinner-table deference to discretion fled at the thought, and he leant towards her, saying—

“Did you mean to madden me, Leo? You have done it!”

“You were very sane just now, while you were eating,” she replied, without taking her hands from the keys.

“By Jove! you’re a perfect type of the women who—

“Warn the touch while winning the sense,
And charm the most when you most repel.”

because I can’t help myself, do you think I have no feeling? Do you think I can sit here, having you all to myself, without the reflection biting

and the old lady's head wagged ominously, and her tones tottered. Leo looked at her cousin ; she was ready to bear all the brunt of the blame, still it startled her to find him willing that she should do so.

" Shocked and surprised," Mrs. Greville repeated ; " before John, too ! If it should ever come to Ellen's ears, I wouldn't answer for the consequences ; and how would you reconcile that to your conscience, I should like to know, Leo ?"

Leo rose up, and Mr. Greville moved a chair out of her way, and evaded her eyes.

" Really, grandmama," she said, crossing over to the old lady, " I think I could reconcile my share in it to my conscience, and my cousin's part to Ellen's feelings easily enough."

" Such extreme freedom of manner was called by a harsher name in my young days," Mrs. Greville replied, severely.

Then Leo seated herself in an inaccessible chair, and thanked the kind star of her destiny for that she had no tender feeling towards this man, who

suffered her to be blamed and worried for his idle gallantry.

It happened that a rumour of the occurrence did reach Miss Bracebridge ; and as John must have been the medium, he lost his place. But this severe measure rather added to the evil, for John grew imaginative under the influence of revengeful feeling and public-house ale ; and as his imagination was not refined, the story roused Miss Bracebridge to such a display of what she called "wounded pride,"—a euphemism for savage jealousy—that Leo was glad to hasten her departure, and take shelter with the Hamiltons. The Grevilles were only unjust, not unnatural, as has been said before. Still, it was hard for the girl to hear Mrs. Greville aver her belief whenever she got Leonie alone, as to its being her (Leonie's) fault that Fred had forgotten himself. It was not in Miss Geneste to defend herself in such matters ; that was the man's part, and if he omitted it she was not going to take it up. But when her grandmother would tell her with emphasis "that she (Mrs. Greville)

was very angry with Fred,—very angry indeed ; but still how could one blame a young man for forgetting himself a little when a girl ran after him ?”—when her grandmother would tell her this, she did sometimes marvel whether Fred heard the same things in silence ?—and if he did, how he had ever dared to talk of love to her ?

There was a patched-up peace between them all before she left. Miss Bracebridge came to dinner accompanied by her guardian and his wife, and as Fred was abject to her she was bland to Leo. There was no direct allusion made to the late unfortunate cause of dissension, but when the ladies were alone after dinner Ellen and her guardian's wife gracefully made Mr. Greville's devotion to his betrothed the theme of their converse, and Miss Bracebridge almost affectionately congratulated Leo on her engagement. But nothing further was said about the double marriage on the same day.

There was something pitiful in the way he wore his chains, Leo thought. He sat by Miss

Bracebridge, and talked to her and listened to her, and was not able to keep his eyes from wandering while he spoke himself, or his attention from straying when she answered. He was devoted on compulsion, and it was doubly hard to be so before the girl who had seen him shaking his chains and declaring his readiness to break them.

"When we meet again, Leo, we shall both be old married women," Miss Bracebridge whispered to Leo when they were parting.

"I'm sure I hope we shall be!" Leo replied, heartily; and Mr. Fred Greville gave vent to sighs in the background. As he had said, "was he to be without feeling because he could not help himself?"

After this it may be surmised that Miss Geneste was very glad when the day came for her to leave these people, who so calmly took it for granted that she was altogether wrong. The night before her departure, Fred did make a little effort to speak to her for a minute alone. He waited for her in the corridor and

intercepted her as she was going to her room.

"I have ventured to get you something that may help to wile away the hours of the railway journey to-morrow, Leo." As he said it he put a book in her hand, and she opened it and exclaimed—

"Oh!—more of Percy Burgoyne's poems! Thank you very much, Fred. You remembered how I liked his first volume a year ago? How very kind!"

"I never can forget any of your tastes;—it would be better for me if I could," he began; and then she checked him by saying "Good night," and hurrying on into her room with Percy Burgoyne's new volume.

She opened the page on a song which she had lately learnt, without observing by whom the words were written. Unconsciously she felt a new delight in seeing they were by him—by the man whose first essays in song had touched some sympathetic strain of melody in her own soul a year ago. These poems were a touch less sweet,

perhaps, than those previous ones—a touch less sweet, but many shades more powerful.

“He must be very young to have improved so much in a year,” she argued sagely, as she turned the pages. Then she read the preface—a preface in which he dedicated these effusions of his muse to “his sister.” She got good hold of the author by the means of this direct address to another. Then she read the poems with the flush of keenly appreciative delight. Passionate as they were, they were also pure. Mr. Percy Burgoyne did not sing things that he dared not have said.

Suddenly a recollection of having heard the name in connexion with something besides song swept across her soul. She got up and unlocked her desk, and looked through several of Claude Hamilton’s letters. The name was not there. Then she found a stray one of Mabel’s—a laborious letter, closely written, in a fine running hand, and then carefully crossed. Here was the source of the memory of that name at last.

“We have nice neighbours,” Miss Hamilton

wrote; "you will not find it dull here. The pleasantest are some people called Pollock, who live at a place called 'The Court.' Mrs. Pollock is the sister of Percy Burgoyne (you read him), the poet."

She put the letter away slowly. "Such people are very apt to give themselves airs," she said, as those who know nothing of "such people" are "very apt" to say. Then she went over to her dressing-table and looked at Claude Hamilton's photograph—a highly-coloured production that was eminently satisfying to her, but simply detestable as a work of art—while she made her toilette for the night.

"I'm glad you're not a poet," she said, gravely apostrophising the likeness, "or I should surely vex you with my shallow wit."

CHAPTER VIII.

A MISTAKE !

MEANWHILE change had been monarch of all at Penge Place and "The Court." Intercourse between the two houses had been frequent, not to say incessant, after that inauguration dinner which was described. Mrs. Pollock took to Mabel Hamilton partly because the girl really was lovable and companionable, and partly because Mrs. Pollock's own home was not quite so agreeable as formerly. It was difficult to say in what the change for the worse consisted. Had the subject been seriously analysed, Frances would have been compelled to confess that things were more orderly and comfortable. But Frances had her instincts; and these told her

that, for all the orderly comfort, her home was not so agreeable as heretofore.

-The most carping social critic could not have said that this was in any way owing to Miss Dennet. That exemplary person did what exemplary persons are much addicted to doing—namely, kept in the right on all occasions. She was on the right side of every argument; her opinions were always orthodox, and she had a good stalwart bundle of precedents and facts to back them with. She never lost her temper; she was always “judicious” with the children, and yet they liked her—not even the servants could say that she presumed on the position—not even Percy could say why she always afflicted him with the same sensations that he had when he heard the filing of iron, or felt the east wind. He could not compel himself to like her, and, truth to tell, he did not struggle hard to achieve this charitable end. He believed her to be a harmless, unpleasant woman, who was antipathetic to him. That was all he thought about her. He, too, was aware of a fine, scarcely per-

aby-

ceptible change having come over the atmosphere. But what it was, or from whence it emanated, was beyond him.

It followed naturally that as Frances was a great deal in Miss Hamilton's society, he should be a great deal in it also. The companionship of women was as essential to him as fresh air or pure water—he could not live and flourish without it. It had long been a habit of his to make Frances listen to everything he wrote, and to half-persuade himself that she sympathized with him about it. Now he included Mabel Hamilton in the audience, and sought for her sympathy too.

In the innermost recesses of his own mind he knew that he might as well read his poems to one of the great, sleek, beautiful, calm-eyed cows in the pasture, and hope for appreciation from the same, as read to, and hope for it from his sister. Still the habit of doing so was upon him, and it was a good habit, and one that he never sought to break himself of—especially after Mabel Hamilton joined the union.

This union was so pleasant to him as it stood, that he would never have thought of strengthening it had he been left to himself. It fell in entirely with his way of thinking that daily, for as many hours as he desired them to do it, two fair women should sit and listen to his rhythmical version of what life ought to be. Lying on a soft big rug at his sister's feet, looking up and seeing that large splendid creature lazily knitting silk purses, and Miss Hamilton bending over waves of worsted work, reading his poems in tones that were exquisitely attuned to his own ear—he found all these things so pleasant that he just drifted on doing and accepting them without even a thought of where the current of events was carrying him.

At last, when they had all got very intimate, and when, consequently, this state of things had lasted some time, Mr. Pollock adopted a tone of stiff reserve towards his brother-in-law, which the latter was quick to feel and resent.

“I shall go and take up my quarters with

my mother, Queenie," he said, rather hotly, one day to his sister.

"Oh, pray don't, Percy," she answered, animatedly for her. "I'm sure Godfrey doesn't wish that."

"What does Godfrey wish, then?" Percy asked. Then he remembered that, after all, his brother-in-law had a perfect right to wish even that; and he added—"Never mind, dear, he does not, I dare say; but I have been your guest long enough—my mother will be jealous."

He soon acted on his resolution to take up his quarters with his mother.

And then, seeing that Frances missed her brother, Mr. Pollock condescended to open his mind on the subject that had annoyed him.

"I very seldom interfere with you, or with any of your amusements, Frances," he began; "you must do me the justice of allowing that, at least."

She opened her great violet eyes in astonishment.

"No, certainly you do not; why should you, Godfrey?" she replied.

"That being the case, you will believe that I have strong cause for saying, that if your excessive intimacy with Miss Hamilton is to end in intimacy only, I shall think you have acted very injudiciously, and hold you seriously to blame."

She inquired, "if she might ask why?"

"Why?—a child could tell you why; you are compromising her with your brother. What old Hamilton can be thinking about I can't understand."

"Compromising her—with Percy?"

"Yes, with Percy. Percy is not *her* brother, recollect. If he is not going to make her an offer, he's acting like a rascal."

"He couldn't!" she said, sitting erect on her couch in her excitement. All the gentle blood in her veins boiled at this epithet being applied even conditionally to her brother. She had been a loyal wife to the wealthy tradesman who had married her; but when he forgot himself,

she remembered that all the traditions of honour were for the man of whom he, the man who had no traditions, spoke.

"He couldn't! But as you thought it, why did you not say it to him?"

"There's really nothing to say; a hint from you would be the best thing. People in the place are speaking about it."

"About what?"

"About his spending so much time there, lolling about like a poodle at her feet. As I said before, he's not her brother, and servants will talk."

"Have they talked to you?" Frances asked, in perfect faith.

And Mr. Pollock felt confounded, for he did not choose to give up Clara Dennet as his informant.

Frances did not obey her husband in so far as "only giving her brother a hint" went. She told him the whole of the conversation, and put him in a rage.

"Come, that's rather aggressive," he said,

when Mrs. Pollock had finished. "I suppose Miss Dennet doesn't think it proper."

"She has not spoken about it," Frances said—"not to me, at least. We must give up our mornings with Mabel, Percy."

But that Percy did not feel at all inclined to do; and when the projected change was mooted to Miss Hamilton (without any reason being assigned) that young lady turned very pale, and said—

"Oh! dearest Mrs. Pollock!" in a most piteous tone.

Altogether it was hard, Percy felt, that he should be cut off from an influence that was so refining and soothing as was the presence of this slender, lovely, sweet-natured girl.

"I didn't know I was so hard hit; I didn't know I was hit at all, till she looked in that way when I went in this morning," Percy told his sister. And when she asked him, "What way?" he said, "Oh, he didn't know, but he would never make her unhappy, the dear little thing."

So it came about that Mr. Pollock and Penge were both appeased by Mr. Burgoyne offering his hand and heart, and the fortune he (aided by his publishers) meant to make out of his poems, to Miss Hamilton, the heiress.

From the first, Mrs. Burgoyne set her face decidedly against the match, "capital thing" as it was, from the mercenary point of view, for her son. She had nothing to say against Miss Hamilton; consequently she said nothing that was personally antagonistic to the young lady; but the elder did not like the younger woman, and showed that she did not like her more by a marvellously distinct utterance of any words addressed to Mabel, and by a rigidity of features, when the girl fell under her vision, than by anything else.

"It will be very nice for Percy to have the money; but for my own part I wish he could have it with some other woman," she said to her daughter, when Mrs. Pollock was expatiating on the delights of the engagement.

"She's sweet-tempered and high-principled,"



Mrs. Pollock said, deprecatingly, "and she's very lovely. What more would you have even for Percy, mamma?"

"Her temper is sweet because it has never been tried, and her principles are high from the same cause," Mrs. Burgoyne said, sneeringly. "I never knew a woman with golden hair have an ounce of brains under it yet. I have no fault to find with your friend, my dear, but if her faultlessness holds your brother I'm very much mistaken."


Then poor Mrs. Pollock, out of the depth of her own experience, sighed, that "It was very hard to know what would hold a man—very hard indeed."

CHAPTER IX.

" MISERABLE SINNERS."

IN a well-meaning but remarkably ill-executed way, old Mrs. Greville had made known Leo's delinquencies to Captain Hamilton. "As my granddaughter is going to become the wife of your son," she wrote, "it is only due to you that I should make you acquainted with the reasons we have for not thinking it advisable that she should be married from our house." Then she went on to give the reasons in a bald and rigorous way, that certainly did not put Leonie's conduct in a favourable light.

It was very much a habit of Captain Hamilton's to stumble over caligraphy, especially over those yards of writing which women are apt to



employ in making lucid anything. On the occasion of the receipt of Mrs. Greville's letter he grew sorely perplexed over the first line.


"Here's something wrong about Leo," he said, nervously, to Mabel. "I wish you'd read it, my dear; I can't quite make it out."

Accordingly Mabel read it, and from the height of her own immaculate conduct since her engagement (which had lasted one month), she looked down, as was natural, with gravely censoring eyes upon Leonie's shortcomings.

"She must have been behaving very thoughtlessly," Mabel said, putting the letter of accusation down by her plate as she spoke.

"Oh, I don't know," Captain Hamilton urged, extenuatingly; "young blood is not always prudent, but as it's over we'll say no more about it."

"I think, papa, that in justice to Claude we ought to tell him; otherwise it will seem so very strange to him—it will look like a slight upon him that the Grevilles wont give the wedding."



"Well, well; better he should think that strange than be bothered about what is past and over," Captain Hamilton replied, and as he said it he felt very sorry that he had not decyphered Mrs. Greville's letter without any aid from his daughter. "Mischief is easily made, and not easily remedied," he went on; "don't let us mar her happiness with any idle chatter."

"Mischief! no, papa, I wouldn't make mischief between them for the world. But an engaged man! and Leo engaged herself! I can't understand anything of the sort coming about at all."

And Mabel thought of herself and her own Percy as she spoke, and felt convinced that their faith towards each other was founded on a firmer rock than it was given to the many to build upon.

It may as well be stated here that Miss Hamilton was just a little angry with her brother at this juncture. The fair-faced, sweet-voiced, blue-eyed sailor was marvellously keen about what is called the main chance, and there

seemed to him to be something akin to imprudence in his sister's engagement with a man who had no money and no profession.

"It's all very well to say Mabel will have enough for both," he said, when his father mentioned that fact to him; "Burgoyne has no business to rely on your giving her an income during your life, sir. I think it a bad look-out for my sister."

Then he did not cite the superior self-control he had shown with regard to Leonie Geneste, but he thought about it, and his congratulations to his sister were cold.

"I spoke very differently to you, Claude, when you told me about Leo," she said, reproachfully.

And Claude answered—

"That was a very different matter; however, you'll please yourself, I suppose."

"Don't you like him?"

"Yes, very much; I like him better than I like his marrying you, that's all."

This having been Claude's treatment of the

matter, it can hardly be wondered at that Mabel should be inclined to judge Leonie a little harshly.

"Claude thinks his the ideal engagement," she said to Percy Burgoyne, the next time she saw him after reading Mrs. Greville's letter.

"So do you—don't you?" he asked. "Leo Geneste is a female 'Admirable Crichton' according to all of you."

"Well, Percy, I'm a little disappointed in her just now; she has been foolish enough to let her cousin get attached to her."

"That seems to be a case of his folly more than hers," Percy interrupted; and then Miss Hamilton told him all she knew about it, rigidly binding him down to the strictest secrecy on concluding her recital.

Mr. Burgoyne had something else on his mind the whole time, consequently he was not an attentive listener.

"Never mind her, my darling," he said, almost impatiently. "I have something pleasanter to talk about, Mabel."

Then he told her, as little vauntingly as he could, that he was recognised—worthily recognised—at last as a poet by competent critics; and with flushing face and flashing eyes he bent towards her, mutely asking for the crowning glory of her applause, which she gave sweetly and quietly to his “success,—not to that which had won it,” it seemed to him.

He hated himself for being chilled by her want of enthusiasm. She was so sweet in her pure restful beauty, so modest in her affection and her manner of displaying it, that he cursed the vanity which made him still feel something to be lacking. It was not her fault that she could not play Laura to his Petrarch—not her fault that she was more interested in the matching of a shade of purple wool for her embroidery while he was reading to her than in his poem and the praise it had gained. He crushed out the feeling of chilled disappointment, telling himself that her perfect beauty and affectionate fondness for him were all-sufficient attributes to enchain him, and that the women who would

give him passionate sympathy—the women who could fire him to the point of his making them “famous by his pen,” would not be the women who would make desirable wives in the nineteenth century. Mabel was a poem herself in her exquisite prettiness—a pure, perfect pastoral; a touch less than an idyll, perhaps, but well worth the reading and learning by heart.

She was very fond of him, of that there could be no doubt—very fond of him indeed; but a little fitful and exacting in her manner of showing such fondness—as mild-eyed women with almost unvarying smiles and golden hair are apt to be. She was a trifle jealous already in a vague way—jealous of the sentiment which made him Queenie’s slave in theory while he tyrannized over her in practice in the brotherly, boyish, bewitching manner that had always been his to his sister—jealous of the fervour of that love of his art which made him treat it as an animate thing, to be wooed and worshipped, and of the tangibility with which he seemed to her to invest the women of old who have been most nobly sung.

She began to entertain feelings of personal animosity to Helen of Troy and the "rare Egyptian," believing in her heart that their names were merely used as a veil, and that Percy had been base enough to love some one else who was like them before he knew her.

Before their engagement was twelve hours old, Percy, for peace' sake, was compelled to perjure himself mildly. Mabel showed herself so unfeignedly miserable at the bare idea of his ever having "cared for any one before" her, that he unhesitatingly vowed, in a broad general way, that he never had done so. But the broad statement was not enough for Mabel ; she went into details which worried him a little, cross-examining him as to Christian names which she had heard mentioned between his sister and himself in the days before his love was declared. There was no doubt of it, Miss Hamilton was very exacting. But then, from the poetical point of view, every allowance must be made for this—she was giving him the first fruits of her heart—there was nothing unpleasant in connexion

with any "buried dead" to crop up respecting her.


Miss Geneste arrived at Penge late one Saturday night. She was met and welcomed by both Captain Hamilton and Claude. The former more than half-fancied he might be looked upon as superfluous by both the young people in the first moment of their reunion, but that consideration did not stay him from paying what he conceived to be "proper respect" to the girl who had been committed to his care by an old brother officer. The chivalrous old sailor would willingly have sat upon the box or ran behind the carriage that conveyed Leonie to Penge Place, rather than be a restraint upon Claude and her. But he would on no account have let pass the opportunity of making her honourably welcome, especially after Mrs. Greville's letter.

In obedience to his desire no word had been said to Claude relative to the cause of Leo's disgrace with the Grevilles. Captain Hamilton knew his son, and fully appreciated the ardour and the jealous heat which could burn behind

that cool, almost languid exterior. So Claude's pleasure in welcoming Miss Geneste was without let or hindrance, until she had been out on the platform a few moments. She jumped out of the carriage neat, and fresh, and unruffled, as when she started in the morning on her long journey—a brilliant vision in black velveteen and grebe—a beautiful, lithe, active creature, who had the good taste to abstain from looking wan and weary. She held her face up to old Captain Hamilton to be kissed, and then she turned to Claude, who stood in a new light to her now, and held out her hand.

“You see I have come back in disgrace, Claude,” she said, half-laughing. “I hardly expected such a guard of honour would meet me after grandmamma's letter.”

He paid no manner of attention to her speech ; the words fell upon his ears without meaning. He was half bewildered by the sight of her heightened beauty—by the ring of her laughter, and the musical notes of her voice ; he was desperately in love with her as he reflected that



she was his own now to glory in. He could only crush her hand nearly in his own, press her arm closely to his side, and mentally curse every obstruction which came in their path, as he hurried her along the platform to the carriage.

"You drive on ; I'll stay and see about your luggage, my dear," Captain Hamilton called after them.

"No, no ; not without you," Leo replied.

She was very glad to see Claude again, but not enthusiastically anxious to be alone with him, or rather she did not think about it at all. But Claude did think about it, and in his heart accused her of coldness, and remembered, as he settled her in her place, that she had said something about "coming back in disgrace."

He was a very winning lover—very chivalrously respectful in his way of lifting her hand to his lips first, and then pressing the latter to her brow.

"My own Leo ! do you feel any of the joy I do in our being together again ?"

"Yes," Leo replied, "more probably, for that

affair has been an annoyance, though I can't help laughing about it now."

"What affair?" Claude asked, and then he heard as much as Leo could tell him as they drove home.

He heard enough, in fact, to make him feel sore and annoyed, and to cause him to call Fred Greville "an unprincipled scoundrel!" Now no woman likes to hear a man denounced for having been in love with her. However clear her judgment may be about other things, she is apt to lose it under such circumstances.

"He's not that," she said, carelessly, looking away as she spoke into the darkness through the window that was not on Claude Hamilton's side. "He was too weak for that," she added, as an angry recollection of Fred's supineness in having suffered her to bear all the blame smote her.

Then Claude made another mistake in saying, "I should think so," rather sneeringly. He did not know all the points of the case Leo remembered. He had no right to believe a man "weak" merely because that man had loved her.

But it was not in Miss Geneste to feel injured with any human being for any length of time; she could not go in and be bleak after such an absence from her "home," as she called this strange place in her thoughts. So as they pulled up at the door, she put her hand pleadingly on Claude's, and said more pleadingly still, if possible,

"Such a trifle, Claude! you're not going to let it make you quietly cool all the evening, are you?"

And Claude—her relation to himself was so very new still—made benign concessions.

For some reason or other Mabel had not written off to tell Leonie of the proposed Burgoyne alliance. She had reserved that as a specially crushing conversational sugar-plum, meaning to come down into the middle of some of the vaunts she half anticipated from Leonie. The girls were about the same age; and Mabel thought it rather more than probable that Leonie might be magnificent or patronizing on the strength of Claude's offer. So she had re-

requested "Claude to leave her to tell Leonie herself about Percy," and had refrained from all mention of the subject in the one letter she had written to her future sister since it became an orthodox subject. She had some vague notion of showing Percy to Miss Geneste first in an impartial way—of listening to the extacies that must assuredly follow the sight, calmly—and then of coming down upon Leonie with the fact of the subject of them being her (Mabel's) property. But Percy had marred this plan by refusing to be at Penge Place when Miss Geneste arrived.

"Claude wont want me—you'll none of you want me ; and I'm not particularly anxious to see your model young lady," Mr. Burgoyne had said ; so the little scenic effect which Mabel had intended producing coming to nought, she had to try another way.

For the first hour after Miss Geneste's arrival there was no getting coherent speech from or making it to her. She was much too interested in the new home, and the appoint-

ments of the same, to do anything but run about the gas-lighted rooms, declare them to "be perfect," and suggest "alterations in their arrangement" in the same breath. Then Claude caged her in the library, with an evident expectation of her exhibiting more affection for him than she was prepared to exhibit. He put his arm round her, trying to press her head down on his shoulder; and her head refused to be pressed down, preferring to peer curiously over its would-be support at the (to her) fatal combination of antique bronze and modern ormolu on the mantel-piece.

"Did you know how much I loved you before you left us, my darling?" he asked; and Leonie shook her head, and poised herself on the other foot in order to get a better balance while she looked round the room, as she answered—

"No; I'm not very quick at fancying people care for me."

"Then I merely ranked with other 'people' in your estimation, Leo?" he said, in a tone of

chagrin; and her great starry eyes flashed round upon him as she replied—

“I was very glad when you told me, Claude; but till then I don’t think I had thought much about it.”

Then he pleaded rather more humbly than he would have done an hour before for her to tell him whether she had “thought much about any one else,” and derived much consolation from her frank negative. It was comforting to know that, if her love for him was a plant of recent growth, it had at least not been checked by any noxious weeds, such as love for another.

“Now I think you belong to me legally, Leo,” Mabel said to her when they came out from the library at last. “Come up and take that hot dress off, and then we will have supper.” Then, as Leo proceeded to empty her pockets preparatory to taking off the hot dress, the volume of poems fell to the floor, and was picked up by Mabel, and Percy Burgoyne got a very natural introduction to Miss Geneste.

“That’s a peace-offering from Fred Greville,”

Leo said, indicating the book with a nod. "He made the house too hot to hold me, as grand-mamma has told you, I know; and then he gave me this book to make me regret that the men I meet are not poets."

"Have you read them?" Mabel asked, still holding the volume in her hand, and looking down at it with a strange feeling that she had sufficient right in them to make her listening to unconscious praise of these poems almost a mean act.

"Yes, I have read them," Leo replied, dreamily. She was very fond of Mabel; but it had never been a habit of hers to speak to Miss Hamilton of the things that gave her the greatest pleasure in the world; she always half-unconsciously dreaded that Mabel would injure the same with the faint praises she usually accorded to most things.

"And do you like them? They are pretty, are they not?"

"Pretty's not quite the word," Leo answered, putting her hand out to take her book from

its mild critic. "Have you read them, though?"

"Yes," Mabel replied, with the proud exultant feeling that now her time was come. "Yes, I have." Then her fair face grew rosy, and bent down with its own lily bend, as she went on—"I told you Mr. Burgoyne's sister lived near us, but I haven't told you yet, Leo dear, that I'm going to marry him." Then the first gap in the hedge of reserve being made, Mabel went on to pour every incident connected with Mr. Burgoyne into Leo's wondering mind; and Leo sat motionless, for once, with her elbow on the dressing-table, and her cheek on her hand, listening and marvelling greatly.


"You lucky girl!" she broke out, when Mabel had finished. "You lucky girl! if he's like his books—and of course he is better than his poems; they all are." (It may be presumed that Miss Geneste's experience of bards was limited.)

"Oh, yes; he's a great deal better than his books," Mabel rejoined heartily, and then she

went on with some words relative to the violet hue of his eyes, and the rich masses of his curved chestnut curls—words which inclined her hearer to the supposition that Miss Hamilton had been free from all æsthetic influences in accepting the luminous fate that had been offered her.

“ I suppose it’s all right,” Leo thought, as she went back into the room where the father and son were awaiting them. “ He will hymn her praises—she is so pretty—and other women will admire the way he does it ; and Mabel will be satisfied with admiring his chestnut hair.” Then she sat down to supper, and gave them an account of her life at the Grevilles’, and of some of the sports and pastimes with which it had been diversified, and by the time she had done that she had forgotten Mr. Burgoyne.

The following day was Sunday, and they all went to church. Mabel would have been a fair model for a saint as she knelt devoutly breathing the preliminary prayer before the service commenced, or rather looking as if she



was breathing it, but in reality murmuring softly—

“Look, Leo! the seat the other side of the aisle, one ahead of this, is the Pollocks’—he’ll be there.”

Unfortunately for Leo’s preconceived idea of Mr. Percy Burgoyne the poet, the only gentleman who came into the Pollocks’ seat was the master of it, Godfrey Pollock, and he looked unæsthetic to a most disenchanting degree. “Good gracious!” Leo said to herself as she looked at him, and a sense of irritation set in with her—the casket was so utterly unworthy of the jewel which she had discovered Percy Burgoyne’s soul to be through the medium of his verse.

But when the Litany commenced, Mabel, looking more saintlike and devout than ever, found an opportunity, as the little boys in surplices chanted out the fact of all being “miserable sinners,” of whispering—

“He is sitting with his mother to-day—there, behind us.”

And Leo, anxious to realize the full force of

the mistake she had made in his identity, at once raised her head and turned it over her shoulder, and found nothing intervening between her eyes and a handsome face that was steadfastly set towards her. Her gaze was fascinated, riveted, as his eagerly searched her face with the look of one who finds what he has long sought for. She had the Lamia spell about her—that spell that men would sooner wither under than attempt to break—

“A daughter of the gods, divinely fair,”

a gorgeous embodiment of his most gorgeous dreams of womanly splendour! He felt her to be all this as he looked at her in that one minute, kneeling there between the woman he was going to marry and the man to whom she herself was engaged. Then he put his head down again in time to fall in with the response, and confess himself a “miserable sinner” with the rest of them.

There was no display of curiosity from the Pollocks’ seat as to the new arrival at Penge

Place. Mr. Pollock attended the church services, as he had been brought up to attend them, with severe propriety. He liked the service heartily himself; he would not have seen it abridged of one word on any consideration, and he was resolved that while he had any control over them, his children should seem to like it too. They were planted one on each side of him, and they were not suffered to wave their weary little dangling legs when sitting, or stretch them out behind when kneeling, or to yawn under cover of their prayer-books, or in fact to let their childish fatigue find an outlet in any way. They were not agreeable children, as has been said, but the heart of the hardest and most intolerant of those who found them disagreeable would have softened towards them, had they but dared or known how to make their sufferings manifest. They were lymphatic children, slow in movement and stolid in mind, but even they went through agonies each Sabbath-day—the pain of monotony and buzz, for it was that word alone that the prayers of the Church and the preachings of their

pastor conveyed to their minds. Buzz, and flies, and a maddening impulse every now and then to surge about and defy papa, and an undefined hope that the heaven they were to go to, if they were good, might be as unlike all this as possible. That was what "going to church" meant for the young Pollocks, and the experience is by no means uncommon.

Large, lazy, placid Frances pleaded for them sometimes, asking to be let stay at home, and teach them not to find it all so odious as she saw they were finding it. But Mr. Pollock would not hear of this; and Miss Dennet, who was a strict observer of all ordinances, privately upheld his determination.

"Mrs. Pollock has not had the benefit of a religious education herself, Godfrey; therefore she does not appreciate its advantages for her children," she said to her cousin when he came to her with a statement of "Frances's belief in the morning service being too long for the children, since it was too long for her."

"I'll spare their mother the mother's trouble ;

I will take them to the morning service always," Clara said, and Mr. Pollock thought contrary but flattering things of her; it was a "piece of self-abnegation" he believed, and he also believed that she found it delightful to go herself, and do her duty generally. Miss Dennet was with them and their papa on this first day of Leonie Geneste's being at the church. She was quite as devout but not nearly as nice-looking as Mabel Hamilton. Still Clara's thoughts strayed a little; she found herself deciding on substituting red cloth for the dingy green baize the hassocks were covered with, "when" (the thought was checked) "if she ever had to decide about any alterations in the seat at all." The Litany was over. "Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!" she sang with the rest.

CHAPTER X.

THE GOLDEN PAST.

"PERCY, you will come home with us to luncheon?" Miss Hamilton said, as they all met just outside the church-door.

"Leo, come for a stroll with me before luncheon," Claude asked at the same moment; and on Leo assenting, Claude took her off at once before the Burgoynes could be introduced to her.

"Percy must give me his arm home first," Mrs. Burgoyne said aloud to her daughter. The lady mother was always a little more languid and lofty in Miss Hamilton's society than at any other time. Good match, as it would be for her son, she could not give her countenance to it heartily. "She's a blue-eyed booby," Mrs.

Burgoyne said, "and Percy will find her to be that when her beauty fades, as it will soon. Why, even now, young as she is, she looks washed out when she has a headache; not that there's enough in her head for it to ache with anything but emptiness," Mrs. Burgoyne would add, scornfully.

"Percy must give me his arm home first," she had said; but before Percy could offer it, Captain Hamilton had reached her side, and was saying—

"You must not go home at all, Mrs. Burgoyne; come in to luncheon with us to-day, and make the acquaintance of my new daughter; where is Leo?"

"Gone for a walk with Claude, papa."

Mrs. Burgoyne relaxed slightly.

"She marries your son, I think I have understood?"

"She does, God bless her!" Captain Hamilton replied heartily; and Percy said "Amen" to the latter part of the sentence.

They went home and waited under the

verandah outside the dining-room door until Claude and Miss Geneste came back. The pair had to walk up a long, flat, broad gravel drive under the full observation of the group awaiting them. It was rather a trying promenade! Percy found himself admiring the firm way in which Miss Geneste brought her feet down, and the unswerving, unembarrassed manner in which she advanced upon them. A Cleopatra in a Marie Stuart bonnet, and a much-gored velvetene dress! No! a being with all the sweeter attributes that it is just possible Cleopatra may have lacked—a “dream of fair women” rolled up into one.

Claude kept near to her almost jealously while she was being introduced to Mrs. Pollock and the Burgoynes. (Mr. Pollock had gone back to “The Court;” it “unsettled Miss Dennet’s mind to go into society on Sunday,” she said. So Mr. Pollock feeling it to be incumbent upon him to see Miss Dennet’s mind met with no disturbing influence in the Penge lanes, allowed his wife to go to the Hamiltons’ without him.) The very

exuberance of the nature which had won Claude Hamilton's love seemed to him now to require pruning. He kept close to Leo as she stood smiling and bowing and giving her hand out at once on the faintest indication that any of them wanted to take it. He determined to teach her a cooler manner, or some "other fellow would be falling into the same mistake that fool Greville had made."

"She is perfectly charming!" Mrs. Burgoyne said to Captain Hamilton. The autocratic old lady had never said so much to him about Mabel, her only son's betrothed. "She is perfectly charming!"

"She is a dear good girl," Leo Geneste's generous-hearted old friend replied earnestly; "her father was one of the truest, bravest fellows who ever trod the quarter-deck; and the girl is like him."

"Is she really?" Mrs. Burgoyne answered, indifferently. She was supremely careless about whom Leo might resemble. That Miss Geneste was a gentlewoman was an established fact—one

that was satisfactory even to Mrs. Burgoyne's mind. For the rest, she liked the girl for herself, for her brilliant beauty and her grace, for her supple figure and subtle manner; for the atmosphere of "charm" there was altogether about this young stranger, whom they all waited for and watched even when they knew luncheon was ready.

Like likes like. The arrogant old woman (for in plain English Mrs. Burgoyne was just this), to whom gentle, polite, yielding Mabel could not bend, won all respect and a fair outside show of it at once from Leonie. It pleased her in some indescribable way that the mother of the man whose writings had thrilled her should look favourably upon her. She had no ulterior motive, but she could not resist trying to please still further the stately dame who was already so pleased with her. All about her was of the order that Mrs. Burgoyne most liked, from the firm, clever, mobile little white hand, to the light, ringing, flexible voice. She looked so thoroughly happy, she seemed to be so heartily in love with life, that it was inevitable that the bit of the

world that had her should seem the gayer for the possession.

"Come and sit next to me, my dear," Mrs. Burgoyne said, as they were about to take their places at the table; and even in Percy's ears his mother's lofty tones had never been so tinged with love before.

By-and-bye the party broke up, Mrs. Pollock going home, and Percy seeing his mother safely into her cottage close by, and then returning with most exemplary speed to the side of his betrothed. While he was away his mother had time to say to him—

"I wish you had not felt it your mission to pledge yourself to marry just yet, Percy."

"You don't appreciate Mabel yet," he replied.

"Perhaps I don't—do you?" she asked, sharply. And he answered—

"Indeed I hope I do!"

"And what made her engage herself to Claude Hamilton?"

"Liked him, I suppose," Percy said, briefly.

"Liked him?—yes; the very tone in which she says, 'Dear Claude!' shows one how much. She is a charming girl; I wish she had the money instead of Mabel."

"That's very kind of you, considering I am to marry Mabel," Percy replied, trying to laugh.

"Oh, yes. I beg your pardon; I forgot that," his mother answered, drily. Then she dismissed him; while she went to lie down and read "Butler's Lives of the Saints," and Mr. Burgoyne returned to Penge Place.

The brother and sister, and Leo Geneste, were in a little oval room at the extreme end of the dining-room suite, when he rejoined them. Captain Hamilton had gone into the library with the *Naval and Military Gazette*, and the last quarter's "Navy List;" and was marking the changes in the service in the way men do, long after they have left it, and their interest in it might consequently be supposed to have slackened. He was very happy—happy in the golden days that had come to him in the winter of his life—

happy in his children, and the assurance he had of their future prosperity—happy in the power that was his of doing good by stealth to old messmates, and old messmates' families, who were living on upon nothing, in the marvellous manner in which only half-pay naval men do live on. He was happy in all these things, but perhaps he was never so thoroughly happy as when he was delivering a mumbling commentary to himself over the new Gazette and List.

“ Bless my soul ! Jessop's got the *Centaur*. Let me see, he was made in '24 and not posted till '57. H'm : Vivian appointed to a coast-guard station. Foolish boy—foolish fellow ! he should have gone afloat again—he's shelved now for life. Halloa ! ' Commander Gascoyne to the Royal Hospital, Greenwich, in the place of John Smith, Commander, deceased.' Poor old Smith ! he's held on there for thirty years, and when he went in he was shattered to pieces, and they said he would not live a month. What's this ! ' Court-martial on board H.M.S. *Excellent*, on Lieutenant Hankin—Dismissed the service.' By Jove ! for

being on shore in plain clothes, against orders." So he rambled on, until he came to a paragraph that caused him to take his spectacles off and wipe them, and still they seemed dim, as he read—

"The *Terror*, under command of Commander Claude Hamilton, is ordered for immediate service on the South Coast of America. The *Terror* is to hold herself in readiness for the transport service."

"Poor boy! before his marriage too," the old man sighed. Then he added, "No, no; Leo will dispense with a grand wedding, and she can join him at Valparaiso; it would be dull for her here when Mabel is gone—she'll be better with her husband."

Meanwhile, in ignorance of this official interference with their destiny, the four young people were very happy in the oval room, making plans for the pleasant passing of the next few weeks. The oval room was just the place to make pleasant plans in. A deep bay window occupied the

whole of one end, and this (though it was early spring) was filled with flowering plants that rose half way up the window, and then sloped down with a gorgeous frontage of bloom into the room. The walls were a delicate tone of grey, panelled with straight gold lines, without any ornamentation. On four of these, large shields of pomegranate coloured velvet, bound with gold, hung as backgrounds to four of those rare, dingy-white crystal Venetian mirrors. The only seats in the room were velvet divans of the same colour as the shields. The floor was covered with an enormous Persian rug: opposite to the window stood a large table of Florentine mosaic; an oblique piano occupied what would have been the corner in another room, by the fireplace. A magnificent album, on a rest two feet square, bound as only Viennese binders can bind books, and containing dozens of water-colour sketches and photographs, was near to one of the divans. A very low, round, brass nail-fastened, velvet-covered table, littered over with all the literary journals and periodicals, showed Percy's influence. A marble

tazza gave out odours of dried roses and other deftly prepared flowers. An exquisite "one-colour" (in several shades) china vase, sent out a breath of pastile to mingle with the rival perfume through its perforated ormolu cover. Instead of the inevitable clock and couple of vases on the mantel-piece, the sheet of glass gave back the forms of three fine antique groups. A myrtle all covered with white stars (from the conservatory), had a little stand to itself close to the couch on which Miss Geneste was sitting, close enough for the girl to break off sprigs occasionally as she talked to the others. It was the very place to make pleasant plans in—a place in which to be at one's best, and to find others at their best. Leo luxuriated in it. Her beauty and her spell deepened with the deep satisfaction she had in all things being so harmonious to her. She was in one of those moods that are the conditions quite as much of high health as of any moral or mental influence. She seemed to be breathing a rarefied air that was all beauty and sweetness. No doubt as to the future assailed her—no re-

rospective memories dimmed the brightness of the glorious present that was all-sufficient. She made it summer in that pretty oval room by the sunniness of her nature. She put out the beautiful fair Miss Hamilton, as a comet puts out some soft serene star that is unlucky enough to be in the path of the brilliant meteor. What she said on that day of their first meeting had little more in it probably than any other young lady's words would have had, but they had the trick of flashing, those words of hers, and Percy Burgoyne knew himself to be dazzled.

Not that the words were chiefly addressed to himself. Miss Geneste was a natural proficient in that art which makes a woman seem most interested in that which most interests the man she is speaking to. She was a mistress of this subtle craft, and in the present instance duty marched with the inclination to please. She had followed each step of Claude's in the service; she knew the dates of his various rises; she threw herself into the spirit of loathing which he had for the dull monotony which had been his

for some time at Woolwich. Percy Burgoyne could hardly constrain himself to say pretty meaningless things to Mabel, as he heard the other girl entering so thoroughly into the minutiae of her lover's calling.

The feeling of being a little sore with her brother still hung about Miss Hamilton. She had fathomed—indeed he had never striven to conceal—the reason of his dislike to her marriage with Percy. She knew that Claude felt that Percy ought to be making money by his talents, and that if he did not do so his talents were not worth much. It seemed to her that now was the time for offering a delicate hint to the one, and at the same time crushing the other. So she took up a book, of which she in common with many of her compeers was very fond, a compilation of proverbial platitudes which has run through some thousands of editions, and said—

“You will do something of this sort before long—wont you, Percy?”

And Percy looked at the book she indicated ;

and as he looked he exclaimed, a little too earnestly, perhaps—

“By Heaven! I hope never!”

“Shall I show you how much my voice has gone off in the last year, Mabel?” Leo said, rising hastily, as she saw Claude’s eyes flash and Mabel’s fill with tears; and on Mabel assenting silently she began and sang a song called “The Golden Past,”—the same one Miss Hamilton had sang in the garden one day, and refused to repeat in the evening, because it was Leo’s.

THE GOLDEN PAST.

“’Twas a golden hour when first we met,
All the world seemed young and fair;
There was love in the depths of your starry eyes,
There was glow in your midnight hair;
There was warmth in the faintest strain of song
That was sung to me then by you;
There was tenderest promise in your tone
When mine mingled with it too.

“’Twas a golden hour when you and I
Rode on by that rose-grown way,
When your eyes’ deep tint matched the blue of the sky,
And your hair shone bright as the day.

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The soft south wind seemed to sigh then of love,
And the bee hummed the self-same air,
And the world was as full of beauty then
As our hearts were free from care.

“They were golden hours! and they are fled!
They are gone! and I am cast
On a plain where no ray of the olden light
Can find its way back from the past.
The love is gone from the starry blue eyes,
And the warmth has fled from the lay,
And the memory now is all that is left
Of that long-past, love-lit day.”*

She sang it utterly without design—sang it simply to get over an awkward moment, and chose it because the words were better in her mind than any other, and she had not unpacked and brought down any of her music. But, as soon as she commenced it, she remembered that the words were Percy Burgoyne’s.

“That’s pretty!—whose is it?” Mabel asked,

* These words have been exquisitely set to music by Miss Elizabeth Philp (to whom I am indebted for giving them a charm they would otherwise have lacked), and can be had of Messrs. Boosey and Co., music publishers, Holles-street, W.

in her limp way, when Leo rose. Miss Geneste mentioned the composer's name; and as she did so she glanced towards Percy and saw that he saw she avoided naming him. She was conscious of no definite feeling in the matter. Weakly she obeyed the weak impulse which frequently leads people to escape the present trouble of giving a few explanatory words, at the cost of a good deal of future vexation and pain to others and humiliating annoyance to themselves.

CHAPTER XI.

BUBBLES.

ON that same Sunday afternoon, while Leo was singing, and Captain Hamilton was marking the changes in the —th, and seeing how his only son was ordered off for foreign service; and Mrs. Burgoyne was reading the “Lives of the Saints,” and Mabel was wishing her lover’s Pegasus would amble into every British household (and become a word therein), instead of vaulting so loftily that she lost sight of him in flight; and Claude was wishing the “manner” he had fallen in love with was “a little different” (probably in fear lest others should go and do likewise), and Percy Burgoyne was repeating that old pet article of his weak, warm creed, relative

to the best method of extracting the truest tone "from woman's heart"—while all these things were going on at Penge the principal members of the Sydenham household were redeeming the time in a variety of ways.

Mrs. Pollock—the great, dear loving Queenie—had her baby with her in her dressing-room, and was happy listening to its babble, and looking into its eyes as it laid upon its back, and rolled promiscuously over all things. It was a soft, pearly-hued baby, with great solemn slate-coloured eyes, and dimples whose name was legion. It did not ask intelligent questions yet, with an air of knowing what the questioned one's answer ought to be; it did not say "Good morning!" or "Good night, dear mamma," in little regulation tones; it did not patter after Miss Dennet in eager though restrained expectation of being given little walks, and little drives in a waggonette, and other little pleasures; it treated the coral and bells which Clara had munificently bestowed upon it with the disinterested contempt only a baby can show for what it does not care for; it

gave Mrs. Pollock more trouble, and was the only unalloyed joy she had now, this youngest child of hers. So she idled away all the Sunday afternoon in loving, and making her babe love her more.

In terribly lax contrast to the proceedings below, where Miss Dennet (with her mind quite settled, thanks to herself and her cousin) was hearing Godfrey the younger say his catechism, the while little Miss Pollock learnt a collect. Their father sat in the room with them superintending these religious exercises, wishing his wife would take a part in them, and thinking each time he came to the bottom of a page of the sermon he was reading that he had made a mistake seven years before in slighting the claims to his consideration which this woman, whose rectitude of purpose so impressed him now, then had upon him.


He certainly was beginning to think very high things of Clara, by way of compensation for his having passed her over previously. She was so eminently good and self-sacrificial, he told him-

self. Without taking the trouble to inquire into the extent of her sacrifices, they imposed upon him considerably. He thought of her as a good, piously-disposed girl, with whom duty was the paramount consideration, and who was withal not at all averse to partaking in moderation of harmless worldly gaiety. He believed in her thoroughly, in fact, and was grateful to her for always seeing after his children's spiritual welfare and his own creature comforts, which latter she had a habit of attending to pointedly, in a way that put his wife's general orders on the same score in the background.

She was not a woman who was fair to look upon. It has been told how her skin had a reddish tinge, and was drawn too tightly and shiningly to be pretty over her features; and how her figure was straight enough, but painfully flat and hard looking—all this has been told, and yet now it must be added that Mr. Pollock's eyes were wont to rest upon her with a very kindly expression. The cousinship between them may be held to be a sufficient explanation

of this fact, or perhaps he had a sense of safety in hearing her—she always expressed correct opinions about proper things—and in seeing her, for she always did what was just, and her duty. Some people are much carried by the externals of propriety in women, even though they have a suspicion of something different existing beneath it. Not that Mr. Pollock had, or would have, suffered himself to indulge in such a suspicion with regard to his cousin Clara. He firmly believed her to be exemplary and excellent—as she was, indeed, in act. It was a weakness, a misfortune, to which he felt very tolerant, that Miss Dennet, for all her lively Christianity, should be a little disposed to see all the blemishes in the woman he had married.

There was nothing delicately beautiful about either Clara Dennet's character or physique, yet the touches with which both are put in ought to be delicate in the extreme, in order that the reader may get hold of her, as it were. I can feel the woman's character, see it myself, but I



am not a sufficiently skilled psychologist to present it vividly to others, I fear. She had plodded on through a barren road and a dreary drab atmosphere, from the time she had arrived at reasoning years until now, and she had never done anything definitely wrong. Whether this righteousness of deed was the result of want of will to do other, or want of opportunity, is one of those points that cannot be determined. She was a woman whose instincts would all lead her to do safe things, and whose training and education had strengthened these instincts. Any evil that she might work would not be the result of deep-laid schemes and vicious machinations ; it would come about far more simply, and be the natural offspring of what was more a want of delicacy of perception than actual coarseness of mind or feeling. There was none of that fine sensitiveness about her which avoids giving pain, as much from a dread of the reaction of the suffering on one's own nerves as from any higher motive. While her feet were set in safe, prudent places, she would take no

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heed of the flowers that knew no more than how to bloom, perhaps, which she might trample to death in her progress.

Not that her progress was urged on by any "set, unalterable purpose;" she was not gifted with the exterior for me to venture to endow her with this special attribute of fragile fiends with lambent eyes and a nimbus of yellow hair. The women who wade through three volumes of more or less repulsive crimes to "inevitable ends" must be lovely, or no one would follow their fortunes. Miss Dennet was simply a quiet, reserved, plain young woman, with a strong desire to be comfortable in a respectable manner, and not too much feeling for any person who might stand in the way of her accomplishing what a prettier woman might have called her destiny.

Not that she was altogether selfish; the being so was one of the snares against which she had prayed in a regular form of words from her childhood: but perhaps it was more her innate inability to be anything "thoroughly" which

saved her from being it, than the prayers she had used, without any very strong belief either in their efficacy, or in their efficacy being needed. She was not thoroughly selfish in act; of old she had toiled to keep the household—of which her father, the inert surgeon, and her mother, his inane wife, were supposed to be the main-springs—in greater comfort than it would have been kept without her toiling. How much of this effort that she made was the result of an instilled apprehension of duty; how much of it was filial love; and how much was due to the mere instinct of order, which flourishes in every woman's breast, it would be hard to say.

It cannot be regarded as a sin of either commission or omission on this woman's part that when her father and mother died she should have sorted their bills, and sold their furniture, and interred them respectably, without much emotion. She had to "think of herself," as she said to her landlady, and she did think of herself without intermission, even to the point of re-

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membering that it would not be wholly unbecoming on her part to cry at her father's funeral.

She had led a quiet, disagreeable, untarnished life. There is nothing dark or desperate about this woman—no bribed husband in the background—no shameful intrigue given over to silence for a time, to explode with greater effect in the third volume. There was nothing about her to be found out, for that inclination towards her cousin had been harmless and unimportant while he was unmarried. But now that she had come to the Pollocks she was dangerous, partly through the very obtuseness which prevented her feeling herself to be so.

The Pollocks' system of life since their marriage has been already described. It has been told that it was a passively happy, harmless, contented household; and it has also been said that few people, even if given to analysing such matters, would have discovered whether Frances and her husband were everything or nothing to each other. She never allowed an expression or

a look to escape her which might serve to show any one that she shared the opinion held by all the friends of her family—that she had married beneath her. He never seemed to expect that she should do more than her mother had bargained for her that she should do—preside over his establishment—namely, as she would over that of a man of his own order, and not perplex herself with domestic details. Up to the date of Miss Dennet's advent they both seemed perfectly satisfied. At any rate, if Francis had suffered either in her pride or in her heart in this marriage, she had never made a sign.

Without exactly seeking socially to sink the fact of being only a tradesman, Mr. Pollock had since his marriage separated himself to a great degree from his own class. He had felt from the first that there would be something incongruous in taking Frances into East-end and City society. She would have gone unquestionably, and have accepted it all as part of the arrangement in which she had acquiesced. She was a touch too well bred for her husband to dread

that she would ever have given herself airs to his old friends. But he saw that it puzzled her when the head of the wholesale house from whence her curtains came invited them to dinner. It opened a new vista to her to be called upon by their wine merchant's wife, and to be treated cordially as a pleasing addition to their *coterie* by the families of the firm who sent in their looking-glasses. She was not a clever woman, or a quick woman. This view of a world of which she had never thought puzzled her; it was a world that was wealthy and full of interest and excitement to those who lived in it—a world that worked hard certainly, but that also amused itself in the same way as did the richer portion of the class she came from; and withal it was a world that did not exist for the society she knew. Yet these people sent their sons to college and into the army! where naturally they abstained from all mention of the paternal occupations.

Gradually Mr. Pollock fell away from his old friends in his own class, and his doing so was

attributed to the influence of his wife, who was a little hardly judged in consequence.

"If Mrs. Pollock had been anything very great indeed," they said, "they could have understood it. But as it was, Godfrey Pollock would have done better to marry some one whose poverty-stricken proud family wouldn't have looked down upon him, and imagined they did him honour by suffering him to support them."

That was the way Mrs. Burgoyne was casually mentioned, by a set whom in all faith she would have held it an absurd condescension to "meet" on apparently equal terms. How she had reconciled herself to the closer union with it, which her daughter's marriage engendered, is a mystery simply.

If Mr. Godfrey Pollock had made his own fortune, and, starting with the inevitable half-a-crown, had risen to his present eminent position in what Mr. Burgoyne called the "bottle-making business," he would probably have been regarded as another example of the priceless value of Self-Help, and have been petted by the theoretical

professors of that creed, and patted on the back. But his wealth, with his business, had come by inheritance. His grandfather and his father before him had stood and watched the making and exporting of the brittle source of their fortune in the same offices and factories. There was not a touch of the romance of success even about Mr. Pollock in his trade any more than in his social relations.

As he gradually fell away from the former friends between whom and his wife he was prompt to detect incongruity of thought and association, he had been slow to form a new circle, never making any advances to new-comers, and responding rather coldly to those made to him by old residents for a long time. It could not be said of him that he thrust himself out of his own class into an upper one. He had made it clearly understood from the first that all the Burgoynes' family friends—all the men who had been admitted to the little court Mrs. Burgoyne had held in India—all the well-rooted cousins who had estates, or who had near relatives who had

estates, or who ought to have had estates in far distant counties and in the sister kingdom—he had made it clear from the first that all these should be freely welcomed at his house. The majority of these only came once, and were, as a rule, gracious and condescending, conveying the impression that they felt “it was a comfortable match ; Frances, poor child ! had everything she could desire ; but still it was a marriage very much beneath her.”

She had never attempted to tone down or to explain away any of the veiled impertinences to which he had been subjected through her, but she never brought the people who could not help thinking of him as—well, very far from “one of them”—to his house again. He had been grateful for her silence, as it spared him humiliation, though he merely accepted it as a proof of her not noticing, and not thinking it worth while to notice things. He knew that he was very generous to her ; but it was not in him to know how very generous she was to him.

But after a time he was drawn into society of

a new sort to him in so subtle a way that he could not do anything save graciously reciprocate. People found out that Mrs. Pollock was well worth knowing, "cultivating," as the phrase is; and so out of a genuine liking for her—which again would probably never have existed had she been all that she was and in poverty—they sought her husband. How much the same people would have sought him, or her, had Mr. Pollock not given dinners that were really blameless, would be a difficult calculation to make.

This was the state of things for some time after Clara Dennet's arrival. But when she began to know the land and the inhabitants thereof, she hinted at certain desirable changes, and Godfrey Pollock soon came to consider it marvellous that he should not have made them before. She took it for granted, first, that he was still very intimate with people whom he had been in the habit of mentioning intimately in the old days when she had known him. Then, when she found he was not so any longer, she, with equal skill, took it for granted that

Mrs. Pollock had caused the cessation of intercourse.

"It is a pity," she said, when he told her—

"No; somehow he never saw anything of these people now—he had thought it better to drop it."

"It is a pity; for after all, Godfrey, all these new acquaintances are your wife's friends, and Mr. Burgoyne's."

"Her friends are mine," he had replied, with a small attempt at a laugh, which Miss Dennet's "Are they!" crushed in its youth.

"Well," she added, after a time, "I should be very sorry not to see my husband's old friends about him, if I were Mrs. Pollock, though they may not be in the army."

This was a sneer called forth by an unguarded allusion Frances had made to some cousin of hers who was on the staff at Malta. Mrs. Pollock had an unhappy aptitude (according to Miss Dennet) for getting into scrapes of this ignominious sort.

"Why will she allude to these relations of

hers?" Clara would ask, with a great air of regret for the weakness questioned: "other people have relatives in the army as well as your wife, Godfrey—why will she talk about them?"

Miss Dennet asked this in the large impartial tone used on such occasions, in blest obliviousness of the fact that the frequent mention of the less creditable relations jarred as harshly on the ears of the gentlewoman born. Miss Dennet was quite conscious that it would have partaken of the character of a vaunt had she blazoned out the fact of any remote connexion existing between herself and any men holding staff appointments. She could not quite realize, or she did not choose to seem to realize, that they came very much in the order of things to Mrs. Pollock—quite as much as did the wholesale carpet, and bottle, and curtain makers to herself and her kindred. It is so very difficult to refrain from charging others with the special snobbish weakness to which we ourselves should be prone had we the opportunity. Miss Dennet, the daughter of the apothecary who had dubbed himself Doctor "without sufficient cause,"

would have given a good deal, if she had had it, to be able to subside, when other things failed her, upon the consciousness of her blood having been cultivated through the veins of a few generations. As this was denied her, she despised Mrs. Pollock for—it was impossible to say what for, since the most inimically-disposed would have hesitated to say that Mrs. Pollock took her stand upon it in any aggressive way. Miss Dennet was not at all “too proud to care from whence she came;” it is only exceptional individuals “who are, and that is enough!”—who dare to be this. Clara not only cared about, but excessively disliked her origin in the recesses of her own heart; but to Godfrey Pollock she always held the tone of rather preferring the trade stratum of society to any other.

“We only render ourselves contemptible, and lay ourselves open to being slighted, when we try to push upwards,” she would say to him in apparent unconsciousness of his marriage and consequent falling away from his old friends. To which he would reply—

"Very true—very true indeed; and there would be nothing gained by it if we did: that set is no improvement in any way on our own."

But though he said this, he did not quite mean it; and though Clara listened, she did not quite believe him.

Soon after this conversation, a bit of which only has been chronicled, the engagement came about between Mr. Burgoyne and Miss Hamilton; and Miss Dennet shook her head and nipped in her thin lips when she was told of it. The warmest feeling in her heart was the one of dislike to Percy. A woman can forgive a man for hating, distrusting, or dreading her; but she cannot forgive him for finding her personal appearance, manner, and voice unpleasant and irritating to his nerves. This Mr. Burgoyne not alone did, but unwarily suffered Miss Dennet to perceive that he did.

"Woman's at best a contradiction still."

Clara disliked Percy Burgoyne, but she was

favourably disposed towards the gentle, quiet girl he was going to marry. At the same time, Miss Dennet would not have scrupled to point out the way by which Percy might have been found wanting in word, deed, or thought, though by so doing she were sure of making her favourite miserable. In all sincerity she did find it hard to credit a poet with the possibility of ever practising the domestic virtues, and in equal sincerity she did deem it a great piece of fortune's injustice that a mere butterfly, such as this special poet seemed to her, should have such a rich store laid up for him through the weakness of others; while she, who in her parable played the part of toiling bee, was and might ever remain in a dependent, not to say subservient position.

Moreover, her partisanship for Miss Hamilton and her distrust of Percy Burgoyne were given an intensity they would otherwise have lacked, through her dull, dogged, unreasoning, unfounded dislike to Leonie Geneste. For the golden-haired heiress, for the gentle-minded and

mannered girl to whom it was given to be always very much in the background on most occasions, however fortune and circumstances befriended her,—for Mabel Hamilton Miss Dennet had so much toleration as is apt to be engendered in a narrow mind by a feeling of comparative equality. But for Miss Geneste she had none—none at all. She could not forgive Leonie that gracious gift of beauty, and charm which is more than beauty, which, had she been “a beggar-maid,” would surely have brought a King Cophetua to her rescue.

It was a dull, dogged, unreasoning dislike, and it threw out its poisonous tendrils and took hold of so many things, that only it could have discovered to be deserving of censure. For the young, life-loving, gentle-hearted girl, all things that had life—all things that could with the like coin repay her kindness, had interest. Rough accents smoothed themselves in response to her hearty greeting, given impartially to wayfarer or labourer as she was sauntering about the sunny Sydenham woods. Surly curs relaxed

into grim good-humour under the influence of the clear ringing tones that made the words "Poor dog !" a title of honour. She was dear as a daughter already to the old naval officer—a sunbeam in his path, the pure and perfect brightness of which neither man nor woman should ever dare to question in his presence. She was much loved and much quoted by Mabel. She was palpably the most invigorating element in Mrs. Pollock's life. She was the privileged pet of the haughty old lady, who, for all her own semi-dependent position, had it in her power to humiliate Miss Dennet more than any other person. Finally, Leonie was avowedly the idol of one man, and secretly the idol of another ;—and for all these things Miss Dennet hated Miss Geneste to a degree that made her very clear-sighted as to Miss Geneste's shortcomings.

And Leonie knew that she was so disliked, and felt and resented the injustice, as was natural in one to whom the suffrages of all were usually awarded. At first, as was her custom, she strove to conciliate the unattractive woman,

who, by reason of that very unattractiveness, could know so little of what made the sunshine bright and life generally a joy to Miss Geneste. But gradually, when her sweet ingratiating attempts were met with a stolid discourtesy that still kept the law of politeness to the letter; when this was the case, the bright beauty drew back in amaze at antagonism coming from such a quarter. After a time there was marked coldness between these widely-opposed women; and while Leonie was half-pitying Miss Dennet for being obtusely and vulgarly tenacious, the latter lady was teaching the little Pollocks to pray that Miss Geneste might be "led into a better path."

CHAPTER XII.

LEO'S LOGIC.

"It chances very unfortunately!" Captain Hamilton was the speaker.

"Unfortunately, yes," his son replied.

"But then Leo is a sailor's daughter; she knows that these separations between man and wife are inevitable."

"Her father having been a sailor will not make the separation one bit less sad to her or to me."

Captain Hamilton moved uneasily in his chair as Claude rose, and wandered away to the window, out of which he looked in a desolate, despairing, heart-stricken way, that betokened to the experienced eye of the senior a severe struggle



between inclination and duty. Captain Hamilton pitied his son profoundly. The man was old now, and his blood no longer leaped warmly through his veins; but he remembered how it had been with him when, in his own early married days, the service had claimed him from his wife. He remembered how he had wildly thought and spoken of "throwing up his commission," and how she had gallantly kept back the tears, which would have washed away all chance of a career for him, had she suffered them to flow. The memory of the day when she had stood with her baby son by her side, watching the ship sailing out of Plymouth Sound, came back freshly to him. The words of the first letter he had received from her after that sailing away rose up legibly before him; and once more he read the passionate plaint, in which she told him that she "could not live without him, if it were not for their son"—their son, who was now called upon to pass through a like trial by fire. The old officer put his hand up to the back of his neck in that

way men have of handling a pathetic situation, as he remembered these things, and looked at Claude, and wished that the weight of the cross of honour laid upon his son might not prove too heavy for him.

The time was evening, and the Sabbath stillness was over everything as the two men gazed out upon the peacefully descending night. They knew that, before her reign was old, the iron which had entered into their souls would be a secret sorrow no longer.

"I may get my orders to-morrow," Claude said at length. "Leo must be told of this to-night."

Then the poor young fellow gulped down a spasmodic sob of grief, and turned round, and tried to shake hands with his old father cheerily, and was rewarded for the effort he made by finding something like comfort in the strong reassuring clasp of the honest true hand that was more tremulous now on account of his son than it had ever been on account of himself.

"Where are the two girls?"

"Gone up to put on their hats for a stroll. When you sent for me, Percy proposed their taking a walk; and Leo said they would wait for me. I have kept them longer than she bargained for."

"Poor girl!" his father said.

"When I see how she takes it I shall be better able to bear it myself," Claude exclaimed, hurriedly.

"She will bear it bravely, be sure of that."

"Aye, bravely! But there are different ways of bearing things bravely."

Then Claude Hamilton ceased speaking, but went on thinking that there would be small comfort to him in anything like genuine calmness and resignation on Leonie's part. Young love is not wont to be calm and resigned under a sickening sense of approaching separation. Claude felt that his load would not be at all lightened by Leo bearing it too "bravely." Then with a "Well, it must be done," he went

away to rejoin the two girls and Percy Burgoyne, who were waiting for him out on the lawn in the moonlight.

“ Claude, you have kept us waiting half an hour,” Mabel said, reproachfully, as her brother came up to them.

Miss Hamilton had been perfectly prepared to agree to her lover's request that they should saunter on and leave Leo to wait for Claude ; but her lover had not made it, therefore Miss Hamilton was just a little put out. There had been worse, indeed, than Mr. Burgoyne's negligence of an opportunity for Miss Hamilton to endure. Leonie had said, “ Do you two go on ; I will wait for Claude.” And Percy had politely replied, “ There is no hurry ; he will be here directly.” No wonder that when Claude did come he was greeted by his sister with the words—

“ Claude, you have kept us waiting half an hour.”

They were waiting in the moonlight on the smooth, close-cropped lawn—Mabel with her hand on Percy Burgoyne's arm ; Leonie stand-

ing alone, with a quantity of black lace draping her head, and wrapped over her shoulders.

“I thought this would do, as we are not going beyond the grounds,” she said, half apologetically, as she caught Claude looking at her; and then she stretched her arms out a little and refolded them, drawing the lace about her more closely still in a way that was very Spanish.

There was something cruel in the ease with which she wore her beauty and her grace, now that he was bound to part with her so soon. He was so fond of her—so perilously fond of her for his own honour—if she very keenly lamented his going, he could not go at all.

He was one of those men who, in the hour of trial, temptation, agony, or uncertainty, take refuge in silence. It was not in him to gloss over the gall of any situation with words. He could not speak simple things when his mind was revolving complex things; and he could not feign to word his way out of a difficulty when he was feeling it to be a great one, to pass out of

which he must suffer. So now, because he was silent and sad, he struck the woman who did not know "the reason why," as being sulky, as he mutely offered her his arm, and turned away from the others.

"Are you not well, Claude?" she gave his arm a little interrogatory pressure as she spoke; and he, as he answered, returned that pressure with interest.

"My father sent for me to tell me some bad news, Leo."

"Bad news—oh! my hand!"

"Was I hurting it?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes; never mind—it's that ring twists round and cuts me. Tell me the news—may I hear it?"

"Perhaps you will only consider it startling, not bad, after all? I am ordered off to the South American station—it's the engagement ring cuts you, is it not?"

Something in his tone made her stand still and look up at him with her face warm and glowing even in the moonlight.

"Oh, Claude, Claude! How can I think it anything but bad, very bad news, that you will have to leave me?" And then the weight of all the influences that had been gathering about her all these years—these years, during which he had been playfellow, brother, friend, and lastly, lover—overwhelmed her with their subtle forces; and Miss Geneste held up her face and put her hands out to him with a little imploring gesture—and still he fancied that there was something wanting!

His understanding was painfully clear and sharp about this matter, and he divined that her first thought had been that he "must leave her"—not that she might perchance go with him. He could not find it in his heart to charge her with indifference; nevertheless, in his heart he felt that her feeling for him fell short of that absolute affection with which he had hoped to inspire her. Then he told himself that she "did not realize it yet;" and prayed a brief heartfelt prayer that he might be telling himself the truth.

"It has come upon me so suddenly that I am unmanned by it," he said. "It will be like death to me to leave you, if I must."

She could not force her truthful tongue to say that it would be like death to her to lose him. Through a certain habit of yielding, through the force of old association and circumstances, through weakness perhaps, and certainly through having an insufficient appreciation of the magnitude and importance of the vow she had made, she had got herself into the toils! But though she had been thus faulty, she was too good to strive to make her position easier now by expressing more than she felt. She did feel that it was bad, very bad news, that Claude should be ordered off; therefore she said as much. She did not feel that it would be like the pang of death to part with him; therefore she would not say it.

"Dear Claude! and the service has been so very near to your heart hitherto, that I feel guilty when I think that I am the cause of

your feeling it hard to fulfil this claim that it makes upon you."

Then she knew that her words were not all that they ought to have been, and reminded herself of how worthy Claude was of being loved by her with all the ardour that was in her. The reflection warmed her towards him, and she went on—

"Mine is such a difficult part, Claude. I ought to urge you on to go where your duty calls you cheerfully—and I cannot."

It was the sweetest thing she had said to him yet; it reassured him, it brought her nearer to him, it made him wholly hope and half believe that he had been hypercritical in his judgment of her manner before. For an instant he thought he was not like a poor fellow who was dependent on the service.

"Can you not, my darling? I would throw up my commission to-morrow if you said the word."

"And your father is so proud of your success! Oh, no, no, Claude! it would be selfish, and you

would soon think it selfish' of me; and your father and Mabel would hate me for blighting your career."

"What is my career in comparison with my happiness?"

"It will make a large part of your happiness."

"That's a hard thing for the girl I love to say. Leo, you don't feel what I do in the prospect of this parting. The ship's commissioned for five years; for three years at the least I shall be away from you, unless——" he paused, hoping she would supply the words—"I will go with you!" but, in honest truth, she never thought of uttering them. It did not occur to her as possible that she could go out and join him at Valparaiso; and she was not strung up sufficiently to suggest impossibilities.

He had taken her hand and was wringing it fervently, as if he would have clasped a corresponding passion to his own into it. "Claude! you are not afraid to trust me; that is not your thought, is it?"

"No, it is not." Again he tried to think he was speaking the truth; again he failed. "But five years—or even three years—it's a lifetime, Leo; you would feel it to be so if you loved as I do. My soul will be dark away from you so long; it will utterly break up my life; can you let me go—alone?"

He had said it at last. He had made the suggestion which he had vowed to himself should come from her—the suggestion that she should accompany him.

"Can I go with you?" she asked in surprise; and again the chill conviction smote him that there was more surprise than joy in her heart at the idea. Then, in somewhat calmer tones than he had used just before, he told her when they must be married if she consented to go, and chalked out her progress to the point of reunion, and painted his own deep gratitude and joy, and love that should smooth away all dangers and disagreeables from her path, and then listened breathlessly for her answer. It came—

"Dearest Claude," she said, "your judgment is sure to be right; your decision, your wishes shall be mine. I will do whatever you like."

He got her close to his heart then, and kissed the chill that had come from the evening air off her cheeks and lips. He would not give himself time to think that there was any lukewarmness about her acceptance of his plan. She had agreed to it—that was enough for a few minutes. When they had expired, he asked—

"Could you have let me go alone, Leo?"

"Other women have had to do it," she whispered; "other women have had to sacrifice themselves to—to—their sense of duty, Claude." She was trying hard, poor child, to make that her duty which came easiest to her.

"But"—here he grew exacting in his strong love again—"you were ready to make the sacrifice without examination or appeal. Leo, did you not think—did you not care to go with me? Why, child, my soul is merged in yours—I have no life without you—and you would have let me go alone!"

"If you had been ordered on a station where you could not have taken me?" she suggested.

"Why then the service and all concerning it would have gone. You don't know what you are to me; you don't know how I love—how I worship each look and tone of yours. You asked me just now if I was afraid to trust you. No! but I trust you so fully—I trust you with so much, that if any man made you play me false, he would have a heavy account to render up to me."

And she had been affectionately fond of him so long; they had been big boy and girl together, and he had always been devoted to her, and now!—now!—had her life depended on it, she could have given him nothing better than this.

"Claude, I could never play you false; I could as soon murder Mabel or your father." The family associations were about her strongly, that was all, and he felt it.

The moonlight, graceful and gentle, tender and true, fell on that scene, and seemed half-pathetic, half-pitiful: Nature was so beautiful

and warm, so opposed to everything like violence and alteration it appeared that night. And he would have given all the grace of the joyous summer night—all the soft safety of that silvered sward—all the ease and luxury, the peace and plenty of the house that was his—to have stood alone, even in a savage wild, and known that he reigned lord of all in the heart of this woman, who held the power in the hollow of her little hand of making earth a heaven or a hell to him.

“Don’t reason with me, dearest ; don’t say wise words and attempt to prove to me that it is well you should endure calmly because we might have been called upon, had everything been different, to endure calmly. The only logic a woman should know is love. Don’t be so sensibly self-possessed again, Leo ; it withers me.”

She would have given much—a year of her life, if the gift would only have been accepted, and it would have availed her anything—to have been able to have abandoned herself to a like passion of despair and love. But she could not do it. She was ready—she was even, as she her-

self averred, willing to do anything that Claude deemed the best thing to be done ; but she could not help remembering that it might have been that Claude should have been appointed to a station where she could not have joined him. Further, she could not help feeling that had this been the case, she would not have put up the impotent, impassioned prayer—"Give me to drink mandragora, that I may sleep out this great gap of time." She was what he called her, "sensibly self-possessed," now that it was too late !

CHAPTER XIII.

“ A SISTER’S QUIET LOVE GIVES MY HEART
TO THEE.”

THE others—Percy Burgoyne and Miss Hamilton—had not stayed in the grounds to vex the agitated pair with sudden appearances and possible interruptions. “ Let us go round and see your mother, Percy,” Mabel had suggested, and Percy, who did, under the circumstances, infinitely prefer the moon to his mother, was fain to acquiesce in the proposition.

“ Yes, if you will,” he replied, politely, feeling as he spoke, that as they had come out of one house to enjoy the beauty of the night, there was a want of purpose in thus immediately wanting to go into another.

Moreover, he could but remember the want

of sympathy which existed between his mother and his future wife—a want of sympathy which almost amounted to antagonism on Mrs. Burgoyne's side. It was a want of apprehension, even if it did not deserve the epithet of obtuseness, on Mabel's part, this voluntary and extremely unnecessary putting of herself in the way of experiencing it. Well as he loved his mother, and much as he respected her for many things, he would have been better pleased to see her either won or fairly conquered by the girl he was going to marry. Miss Hamilton's timid measures were always visibly falling short of doing either thing, and after each interview between them, Percy had the mortification of knowing that his mother thought less highly than before of Miss Hamilton's intellect and general fitness for being his wife.

"We thought we should find you at home," Mabel said sweetly, when they went in and found Mrs. Burgoyne with the "Lives of the Saints" open before her; and then Mrs. Burgoyne laboriously lifted her spectacles away from

"I am glad you like Leonie so much, as of course we shall all be very much together," she said, simply; and Percy liked her better for that speech than for any other she had uttered.

There was no more said about Miss Geneste just then. The conversation took a turn, and still keeping within family bounds, wandered off to the Pollocks. "Frances gives up her children a great deal too much to that Miss Dennet," the proud old grandmother commenced. "I saw them walking this evening; they passed the gate as I was standing at the window."

"I suppose she saves Frances trouble," Percy suggested.

"A nursemaid could do that better than this hybrid; it is spoiling such manners as the children get by inheritance from their mother, this association with a woman who claims what she cannot command—the right to be treated as a lady."

"I am sure she is very kind to the children," Mabel said, in a deprecatory tone; "she is

always doing something for them, isn't she Percy? She is always active."

"Actively unpleasant, to me."

"You are prejudiced against her, because you say she has hard cheeks and an angular figure. You're a beauty worshipper, Percy." Then Miss Hamilton went on to say, that for her part she liked ugly women quite as well as she did pretty ones, which seemed to Percy to be an unnecessary expression of bad taste.

"They are mistakes, that is all," Percy said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Percy, it is almost wicked of you to say so; they do quite as much good as beauties, quite. For instance, there is Leo, she¹ is not half as useful in her generation, as you would say, as Miss Dennet."

"I am not going to dispute the point," Percy replied, wearily. Then he looked at his mother and saw that she understood that the utterance of these platitudes was grievous to him. He despised himself for it, but still he could not help feeling that Mabel deserved to be in the position

of one whose words were lightly esteemed by his mother, since she (Mabel) had dared to violate good taste to the degree of comparing, or rather contrasting, Miss Geneste with Miss Dennet. He knew that he would be compelled to hear of it again—that his mother would mention it in confirmation of some statement which was sure to be made in the future, and equally sure to be adverse to Mabel's interest. "I think we have interrupted my mother long enough if we can find nothing better to talk about than Miss Dennet's graces and Miss Geneste's shortcomings," he exclaimed, rising up as he spoke.

Then Mrs. Burgoyne took a carefully regulated farewell, kissing her son with the warm proud affection she felt for him, and giving Miss Hamilton her left cheek to salute.

"I suppose you go to bed early on Sunday nights?" Miss Hamilton said as she was walking away; and Mrs. Burgoyne replied—

"Yes; my reading is delayed to-night—I am later than usual." When they were gone she took down her Bible and read how a mother of

old had cried unto her lord—"I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

"Oh, Percy! Leo had read many of your poems before she ever heard that I knew you," Miss Hamilton said, as they walked along home.

"There is nothing so very extraordinary in that. My dear girl! to hear you, any one would imagine mine to be a more limited public than it is even," Percy replied, rather haughtily.

"Well, I had never heard of anything you had written."

"Though you sang some of my songs?"

"One never thinks of looking at who wrote the words," Mabel said, frankly; "but I was saying, Leo has read many of your poems, and she thinks a great deal of them. I said they were very clever, I knew, because you had told me so."

"You didn't say that to her, did you?"

“ Yes, I did.”

“ And what did she say ?”—(“ A precious ass she must think me !”) he added, to himself.

“ She said she was glad you were above the false humility of trying to underrate yourself.”

“ Miss Geneste being in love with that fine, dashing, enterprising, practical young officer, your brother Claude, probably looks down upon mere men of letters as poor tame creatures ?”

“ No, she does not ; no, I am sure she does not. Indeed, I don’t think she values fineness and dash and enterprise and practicality, as highly as she does the sort of fame you will have.”

“ Did she say that—‘ The sort of fame I shall have ’ ?”

“ No ; she took it for granted that you had it already.”

“ And you undeceived her ?” he inquired, with a little bitter laugh.

“ Well, I told her what you always say, that you have not touched your highest yet ;—when you do, of course you will make an immense deal

of money, I told her. I was not going to let her think you a poor poet, you know."

Percy Burgoyne said nothing to this, but walked the rest of the way in silence, thinking how charming it was for a woman to be endowed with the commercial mind, and how thoroughly that acute Miss Geneste must applaud the wisdom of his choice. Then he wished several things—among others, that he had not drifted into this engagement; and that, since he had done so, that he were endowed with the courage to tell Mabel not to discuss his literary prospects and merits with any one of her friends, and specially not to do so with Leonie Geneste.

"I am sorry you should feel the mark I have made to be so small a one that it is necessary for you to point it out in order that it may be seen, Mabel," he said, as they came into the lighted hall of her father's house. A moment after he wished that he had not said it; it sounded too severe a thing to be uttered to that graceful, golden-haired girl, with the wild-rose bloom on her face, who turned to him as she

took off her hat, and, lifting a white slender hand to smooth the glittering tresses, asked him—

“If her hair was neat?—could she go in as she was?” Her beauty brought him back again, he caught the hand as it came down, and quoted—

“Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked, wonderingly. “Is that your own? Mine is not a ‘classic face.’ You know, Percy, I am not conceited enough to believe that it is;—that was a ‘bad shot,’ as Claude says,” she wound up, laughingly; and he thought the last two lines were even wider of the mark in their application. It was not in the beautiful Miss Hamilton to bring her æsthetic lover home to the glorious bournes he had named.

Despite this conviction, they both went into the room where Captain Hamilton, Claude, and

Leonie were sitting, with a degree of self-satisfied gaiety in their bearing that grated harshly on those already assembled. Claude was by the table with a map, the *Naval and Military Gazette*, and the *Navy List* before him. He was looking out where he had to go, and what "standing" those who were with him had, and he looked earnest and occupied. His father was opposite to him, watching his son, and evidently holding himself in readiness to answer any remarks his son might make. Near to him Leonie was seated, leaning forward with her arms in her lap—listening, watching, waiting.

The young man rose abruptly as his sister and Percy Burgoyne came into the room.

"Mabel, we shall have a wedding in the family sooner than we thought when you went out. Just read that!"—he handed her the *Gazette*, and showed her the paragraph in which his appointment to the command of the *Terror* was announced. And Mabel read it to herself, and then exclaimed about it—

"Oh! how horrid—what will you do?"

"May I see it?" Percy asked, eagerly; and Mabel said—

"Yes, it's horrible!" and proceeded to read it again carefully, thereby causing Mr. Burgoyne to feel very impatient.

"It's my appointment to the command of the *Terror*, to serve on the South American station," Claude said in explanation, turning to his future brother-in-law.

"No,—you don't say so?" Then he took the paper from Mabel and read it. "For five years too!" he said, looking up when he had finished.

"That will probably be only three," Captain Hamilton, senior, suggested. Then Percy could not help looking at Leonie, and he saw that she was very pale, and that she could not reply to some tender words of comfort, which Mabel was evidently speaking to her.

"It's no use telling you that the time will soon pass, because it will do nothing of the kind. But I hope, with all my heart, that it may be three years instead of five. As your father says, three will be hard enough on you both."

He had struggled to say the right thing, and he had said it ; and he felt that he had said it, when Claude replied,

“ Thank you, Burgoyne ! Whether the three years that I must inevitably be absent are to seem an eternity or a mere nothing, depends on whether my wife is with me or not.”

At the words “ My wife,” Percy Burgoyne turned back to the perusal of the paper, in order, as he told himself, to spare Miss Geneste’s feelings. She could not help being painfully confused, he thought, at this premature mention of her. It savoured of coarseness on Claude’s part. Mr. Burgoyne was sorry for it.

But Leonie betrayed no confusion ; she lifted herself erect as Claude spoke, and when he had finished she looked at him with a sort of yearning, pitying loving-kindness, that puzzled Percy (who could not resist watching her round the edge of the paper.) That look brought Claude to her side, and then she very openly rendered up her hand to him as she said—

“ My will is yours, Claude !”

It was what she had said in the garden ; it was what she had said when they had first gone in to discuss the point with old Captain Hamilton. " Her will was Claude's "—she would say nothing as to her wishes.

" You are not afraid to go ?" he urged.

" Do you mean afraid of the voyage ?" she asked.

" Yes ; of the voyage—of the dulness—of anything, in fact."

" Neither of the voyage nor of the dulness," she answered promptly ; and then, as he bent over her, pressing her hands and searching her face, as if he would have read therein every secret of her soul—as he did this she shrank not from him, but from his masterful manner. She felt that, for all the old regard—the love which had become second nature to her from habit—it was within the bounds of possibility that she might become afraid of Claude Hamilton. The feeling that she would in no wise belong to herself—that he would not only want to, but would insist upon, absorbing all her thoughts, all her love, all her time ;—the feeling that she

was not prepared thus to merge herself in another, came over her and almost took her breath away as she moved her head from side to side, and still could not remove her eyes from his, that fascinated her like a basilisk !

Presently—the other three were all talking together, feigning at least to be non-observant of them—Claude bent down nearer to her, and there seemed to come a weight upon her head which bowed it down before him.

“ You do not love as I do,” he whispered ; “ instead of the fierce joy that shakes my soul at the thought of taking you away from every one, yours is shaken by some dread or some reluctance. Tell me which it is, Leo ? You are driving me mad !”

She hesitated, she faltered—she, the proud, brave young lady, who had never doubted for an instant as to whether or not she would do anything that she wanted to do, and felt it right to do—she trembled now as she was introduced to these hitherto unknown depths of feeling.

“ You are not quite like yourself—or I am

not well—or something has changed, I'm sure," she murmured, piteously. "Let me go now, Claude—do, do! I can bear anything to-morrow, but now my head is whirling!"

"I cannot let you go—I will not let you go." He was an utterly different Claude to the one she had known all these years as he said this. He was frightening the affection out of her, and not gaining her love. Very much to her own distress, she could not help thinking of Othello—of Othello with the pillow in his hands, and utterly incapable of hearing reason—as she looked up into the fair handsome face of this young English lover of hers. As in a dream, she knew that Percy Burgoyne was taking his departure—that he was shouting out good night to Claude and herself, and that Mabel and her father were going out to the terrace with him, avowedly to look at the moonlight on a wood that slanted down in the foreground, opposite to the house. Then a white terror crept over her as she realized that so soon the hour might come in which this man's passion would force

the truth from her, that she did not love—that she never could love him as he loved her.

Fast over brow and cheek and throat there spread the livid skin-tightening sensation that was leaving her colourless and cold. Down to the tips of her delicate fingers went the icy thrill that made him start and then clasp her hands more closely in vain attempt to warm them.

“Every kindly feeling, every loving thought I have is yours,” she began; “it would break my heart to see you unhappy. Oh, Claude, let me learn to love you another way to that I have always loved you in. I must, or you will kill me.”

He let go her hands and lifted her up, and she shook in his grasp like a reed.

“Kill you?”

“Yes, kill me with remorse for not being able to love you as you love me; I can’t marry you yet, Claude. Oh, forgive me!—forgive me!” She moaned out the last words in the tone of one who was desolate indeed—moaned them out standing droopingly alone, for he had re-

moved his arms from her as he spoke—he had cast her off with a smothered cry such as she had never heard from man before, such as she wildly prayed she might never hear from man again.

“I would give my life—my soul—for you if you loved me,” he said ; “as it is, I will not give another moment to the woman who has deceived me.”


“You must not leave me so, Claude”—she sprang back to his side, oblivious now that she was about to lose it of the terror and difficulty his love had just been to her—“I have not deceived you ; it was only—only—” she stopped, and the crimson blood rushed back to her face and pleaded more eloquently than even her words could have done. Her charm reasserted itself—she resumed her sway without further effort. He could not give her up ! She might dictate the terms on which he was to keep her. He would not urge her again, he would not frighten her into submission to his will. Strong as his passion was, he subdued it (for the time at least)

to reason, and resolved that when she came to him it should be willingly, with the full, fervent gladness such a woman as Leo could feel in going to a man she really loved. So he held himself very much in check.

CHAPTER XIV.

RENDERED UP !

A VERY visible constraint fell over the whole party when Captain Hamilton and Mabel came back to the room. Claude had returned to the study of the *List and Gazette*, Leonie had fallen upon some flowers and was re-arranging them, much to Mabel's annoyance, for Miss Hamilton believed the composition of bouquets to be a speciality of hers, and consequently she could ill brook any alteration being suggested, let alone actually effected. However, for this once she found it in her heart to forgive Leonie, on the ground that Leonie was scarcely responsible for her actions now that the brilliant prospect of her marriage loomed so closely before her.



Captain Hamilton watched the girl whom he had brought up and guarded zealously as a daughter very closely, as her nervous hands quivered about the blooms—going through the work of supererogation of picking out leaves that were not dead, and breaking off ends of the stalks that were almost fresh—and he saw that all was not well with her. The mental and moral atmosphere by which she had been surrounded during the last ten minutes had been sufficiently warm to make her tingle in every vein for the time with a thousand emotions. She had been partly frightened and partly flattered, partly persuaded and partly put far away from Claude by the very force of his persuasions. The change which her reappearance in heightened beauty—her being his own—and this sudden note of parting had developed in Claude startled her very much. It was as if a pet lamb had suddenly leapt up at her side in the similitude of a roaring lion. It was a prouder tribute to her, the love of the lion, than the tame services of the lamb. Nevertheless she dared not

put her hand on the lion's mane and seek to soothe him. She dared not. Even now he sent jealous glances towards her, as though he grudged the flowers the lightest touch of the hand he prized so highly.

"It seems to me that we shall do no good by talking it over any more to-night. Let us take the night to consider it, Claude. Good night, my children all!"

It was a signal for separating that they none of them attempted to disobey. Claude came round and took his father's hand in both his own, wringing it hardly; and the two girls bent their brows forward to receive the same paternal salute in which there was not a shadow of difference. Then the others said good night, and there was no kiss given and received between Claude and Leonie. And then they went their several ways.

"He is angry with me; he expects too much too soon," Miss Geneste said to herself. And then her conscience told her that the fault was more hers than his. Their engagement had been the

fruit of certain conditions which had made it appear a safe and reasonable and even a joyous thing to her. But these conditions had been known to her alone at the time, Claude was ignorant of them. He had sought her for herself alone, because he loved her as he knew he never could love any other woman, because he prized her so highly that he could not have endured to see her won by a man who might perchance prize her less. These had been his reasons for seeking her—these, and the belief he had in her perfect, pure, proud integrity. The reason she was won by him was that to herself she had seemed at the time of his wooing to be in a very sore strait.

The power, the magic power of association, the force of family feeling, was upon her so very strongly in the matter. She loved all the Hamiltons, loved them dearly with all the warmth of her warm, grateful, generous heart. As she had said to Claude, she could as soon have deliberately murdered his father or Mabel as have deliberately played him false. As one

of the Hamiltons Claude was very dear to her ; but when he wanted to be everything, and take her away from the rest, she began to think of and to tremble at what she had done. Now that she was alone, subjected no longer to the bewildering influence of words and caresses that were warmer (she felt guiltily) than she should have suffered Claude's to be to one who could not pay them back ; now that she was alone the truth would tell itself to her, and she knew that she had not done well.

The first weak womanly thought that came to her after taking in this truth was, " How shall I get out of it ?" She told herself upbraidingly that she had wrought a bitter wrong in ignorance to a man to whom she was bound by every law of delicacy and gratitude to have acted nobly and truthfully. She told herself that now she knew herself, and was bound in honour not to go on working him this injury. She told herself that she had been a serpent in their midst, that she had repaid their care and love and loyal generosity to her with all that is falsest and

worst, meanest and lowest in a woman. She had played—or rather she would seem to them (her only friends) to have played woman's basest game, the stakes Claude Hamilton's honour and happiness. And when she had told herself all these things, she rose up declaring that she could not be her father's daughter and do these things—she could not drag his name in the dust at the feet of those who had cherished her for his sake—she would go through with what she had undertaken, or——!

No, she never thought of evading her misery by dying. Life was so sweet, her pulses were so full, the grace and the glory and the goodness of "being" were so very much before her. She had thus much of the old pagan about her that she desired to taste the fullest here, in uncertainty of the hereafter. She rejoiced in herself, in her gorgeous beauty, and the grace that gilded all her actions, making the world pleasanter to those about her. She rejoiced in herself even now that she was condemning herself for that fatal facility for drifting which had

brought her to this pass. And then she pressed her hands upon her heart, and wondered whether its wild beatings would tell its tale of mission unfulfilled to Claude during those long years in which they should be away from every one, and ought to be all in all to each other.

For she was resolved to go through with it now, to bear anything, to feign anything, to suffer anything rather than that Claude and Claude's people should know themselves ill-repaid by her. She strove to strengthen her resolve by recalling all her best memories of him, as she had known him first as the generous gallant boy, at once her champion and her slave; as she had known him later, always carefully considerate of and deferentially devoted to her; as she had known him last! There she stopped and gathered herself together to bear the memory, and not shrink away from it!


Then she went on again, thinking of what his life would be (since he did love her so) away from her for those five long years—or rather what it would have been if she had not made up

her mind to go with him. She pictured him doing his duty ("Claude would always do that manfully!") and wearying for those written words of hers that should never seem warm enough even when they did come. She pitied him and herself profoundly.

"Was it always so?" she questioned. "Was it one of the curses of humanity that the perfect union, where each shall love fondly and fully, shall never be known? Must it always be so, that one shall give more than the other, one serve and the other receive services, one dream of no higher bliss in life than the love of the other who is unable to give it?" Then she attempted to reason about it—to reason about the unreasonable beautiful Will-o'-the-wisp, that is so much more than "half-divine," that when rash mortals essay to handle it, they generally get burnt with a fire for which they themselves are the fuel! Attempted to reason about it, and to prove to herself that all the tangible conditions were ready at her hand, and that the rest were mere idle fancies, and could not convince herself with

her own feeble sophistries, and wondered whether Mabel's would be a perfect union with Percy Burgoyne, and then went to sleep, and dreamt that she was a very old woman with furrows and a cap on, and that she had been living for many years on board the *Terror* with Claude.

Despite all her resolutions of going through with all that might be before her, her heart did give a start and beat painfully the following morning when she saw Captain Hamilton and Claude taking their quarter-deck walk on the lawn, waiting for the post. She saw this potentate come at last, saw him deliver up a long official document to Captain Hamilton junior, and knew that Claude had got his appointment, possibly his orders to join his ship at once. She remembered that she owed everything to the Hamiltons, and that she must not hurt them by falling short of what they expected of her now. Theoretically she was ready to brighten Claude's path, and exalt Claude's aim to any degree. The fame he could win would never be the sweetest fame to her; she belonged to the



order of women who would rather be hymned by a poet than heart-served by a hero. To be "made famous by the pen" of some one whose written words should live on through the ages was to her a higher thing than to be made "glorious by the sword." Still for all this she would seem to covet fame for him, she would feign to value it. She would elevate the character of the heart-service over that glittering head-service which might have been paid had all things been different. She would be worthy of the love of a loyal gentleman like Claude, and never suffer a back thought as to other people's proficiency in anything else, anything higher than the things he touched, to arise. So, armed with good resolutions, she went down to meet him.

He met her on the door-step. His father had just gone in to breakfast, and Mabel was waiting for them; still he persuaded her to take one turn with him.

"Just come to the end of the lawn with me, Leo."

Then he gave her the long letter with H.M.S. stamped upon it—the letter containing his appointment to the command, and the statement that sealed orders awaited him on board the *Terror*, which he was not to break until he had sailed out of Portsmouth harbour.

“Do you see the date?” he asked, when she had read it.

“No;” she shook her head, and commenced the re-perusal of it.

“It’s a quick thing,” he said, taking it from her; “Heaven only knows whether I have to be grateful, whether it spares me a sharper pang or not. I must leave you to-day, Leo, and we sail the day after to-morrow.”

“Claude! Claude! Claude!”

It would not find vent in words, this passionate tumult which arose in her soul. It was taken out of her hands now; the decision to which she had come, in such doubt and agony, was made of no avail!—of no avail now that she was willing, with all the power of willingness in

her, to spare this "one of the Hamiltons" any pain he might feel in parting.

"It is better so, love," he said, gallantly; "all the suffering will be mine now, Leo."

Then he took her in, and the girl sat down, dumb with pain and doubt, and heard them talking eagerly of what active preparations must be made at once in order that Claude might "go off comfortably."

"Go off comfortably!" Mabel said the words, and how horribly they sounded in the ears of the man who felt as if the pains of death had got hold of him when he thought of going off at all. In the course of that morning's conversation with his father Leonie had been mentioned, and her position discussed. Captain Hamilton delicately but decidedly insisted upon there being no over-persuasion—no overwhelming moral force used to induce the girl to marry in haste that seemed terrible to her.

"I watched her closely last night," he said, "and I saw that in her face that would have made me release her if I had been in your place,

Claude ; your happiness is dear to me, my boy, but I feel like a father for the girl who came to us a little innocent child, and grew up with us, loving us as her own, loving Mabel and you like brother and sister ; she can't love you in another way yet, if she can ever do so."

"Even if this had not done away with the possibility of my marrying before I leave"—(Claude touched the order as he spoke)—"I promised her last night that it should be as she wished ; she asked for time, and I will give her time. I'd serve as Jacob served without a murmur, with the hope to cheer me on of getting her at last ; but I cannot give her up—I will give up my life first—I cannot give her up, sir ; you are less generous to me than you have ever been in suggesting that I should do so."

"I would spare you both further pain ; you, my brave boy, deserve something better than to be borne with by a woman ; and she, poor little thing !—there, I pity you both !—I pity you both !"

"She will love me yet," Claude said, speaking

in a low impassioned tone ; " she will love me yet—she must, it would be unnatural for a soft, sweet, gentle woman not to love in return for such love as I give her. From the moment I thought of her first as my future wife, no other woman has won a warm look, or word, or thought, or the semblance of one from me. My love for Leo has given me faith, for I believe that the heartfelt prayers I offer up that I may win her wholly will be granted."

" May they be so !" Captain Hamilton began.

" Amen," Claude interrupted. " May they be so ; meantime I leave her in your charge, and as you love her as a daughter guard her as one."

Then they went in, and Claude met Leonie, as has been seen, and had those words with her which have been already told.

Later in the day the two young men who were to be brothers had a few words together.

" I'm awfully sorry for you, but the time will pass itself away sooner than you now think it

will," Percy said, in what he intended to be a consolatory tone.

It was easy for Percy, Claude felt, to see the brightest side of things, and to prognosticate the speedy passing away of a period of years that were to be made very golden to him (Percy), but it was not so easy for Claude to be convinced of the soundness of Mr. Burgoyne's light philosophy.

"You would poetize them away, I suppose—write despairing ditties—howl out your woes on paper, and eat, drink, and be merry in the flesh?"

"'Tis toil must help us to forget,"

Percy sang out laughingly. "The command of the *Terror* will give you as much to do as the making of a book of songs would give me; however," he added, heartily, "Heaven send you a speedy and a safe return!"

Something made the two men shake hands at this juncture; it was Percy Burgoyne who made the first movement, and the other responded fer-

vently. That hand-clasping broke the ice between them, and made Claude say words that an hour before he would have deemed it impossible that he could ever have uttered to Percy Burgoyne.

"Before I come back you will be my sister's husband," Claude commenced, and Percy coloured freely, and said—

"Yes, I hope so."

"You will have a brother's right then to watch and guard Leonie," Claude went on, earnestly; "use it well, Burgoyne—use it well, by all you hold highest. If I go away with her promise to be faithful to me, I shall feel that she will never be false, and that feeling will be my salvation. I render her up to you as a sacred charge; if she falls short of what I stake my honour and my life on her being, punish the man who makes her do it as he deserves—call him to account."

Once more he held his hand out to Percy Burgoyne—once more Percy Burgoyne took it, and mutely pledged his faith to discharge that trust which Claude so touchingly vested in him.

"I will be a brother to her," he said, when he could find words to speak at all. And Claude made the words very binding by believing them.

So she was rendered up in the bravest, best way to the man who undertook to keep watch and ward over her for his friend. So the promise was given—so the task undertaken, that any one who should seek to undermine Leonie Geneste's loyalty should be called to account.

CHAPTER XV.

"A MADNESS OF FAREWELLS."

THEY had heard his last words; his hand had clasped theirs for the last time; his farewell kiss was on his sister's brow. Now they stood together—Percy Burgoyne pallid with sympathy, old Captain Hamilton wiping his eyes, and vainly trying to make them think that they were not tears which he was wiping away, and Mabel sobbing bitterly. They stood together, never uttering a word, while Claude and Leonie were parting in another room.

He had sent her into this before him, with the words, "I must have you alone at the last, my darling!" And she waited for him, leaning against a high old oak chair, with her hands

pressed tightly on the top of it, and her face bowed down upon her hands. Her knees were trembling, her teeth chattered against each other as her breath came pantingly, and her heart beat as it had never beaten before. She knew that in the few minutes which had to be passed before Claude Hamilton left, she should have to listen to words that would have a very solemn sound to her. She knew that she should be compelled to see a man suffer as she had never seen one suffer before, and she strove vigorously to prepare herself to steady her own nerves, in order to give Claude such support as seeming calmness might give him. She was well prepared for a painful scene, but she was not prepared for what she had to endure.

He came in, and he was at her side in an instant, lifting her face up, tearing her hands from the chair, gathering her close to him with a fervour, a fierceness almost, that brought back her memories of the old ballads in which border nobles are represented as bearing off the brides they craved in the gallant old spirit of taking

when they had the power, and keeping what they could. She almost wished that he would carry her off without giving her time to doubt, or fear, or hesitate. When he released her he knelt down before her, and held his clasped hands up to her in an attitude of such supplication as he had never thought he could have assumed to mortal.

“May every blessing that Heaven has to bestow be upon you! May your heart never feel one throb of the horrible anguish that is filling mine; I shall pray for you every hour of the day! Put your hand on my head and bless me, Leo!”

She did as he told her tremblingly.

“Now kneel down,” he said, and when she had obeyed him he went on; “and pray with me that you may never be led into the temptation of wronging the mighty love I bear you—that you may never send my soul to perdition by playing me false—that the heaviest curse may light upon the one who seeks to undermine your plighted troth if he succeeds; say the words with me.”

He said them again distinctly, syllable by syllable, and she repeated them after him, growing cold the while with the deadly chill of a most horrible dread.

"Now say Amen," he commanded, and she obeyed him humbly.

"Be every curse of every sin upon the one who makes you a traitor! But you will not be—you dare not be—my love, my darling! You will never do it, for you will never poison my faith in Heaven and man."

"Claude, what words can I say that will increase your trust in me?"

"None—none that can add to my trust or lessen my agony." Then he bowed himself before her again, worshipping her with such worship as only a strong true heart can pay, vowing to keep her image pure and undefiled before him always, and never to wrong this deep devotion of his life by the admission of one thought she might not share. "I shall come back as unsullied as my sword; I will serve you in the noblest way a man can serve a woman; in return

I must reign and reign alone in your heart—you must swear to be worthy of me.”

After that his passion melted into pathos, and he implored her with a touching humility “to pity him for loving her so well that his life would be but one long protracted, acute pang while he was absent from her.” And then her lips were signed with a sign that left an indelible impression on her life, and she knew that he was going from her—was gone !

Gone for years ! and when the years were over, “How shall we meet again ?” she thought, wildly.

“ ’Tis God made man, no doubt—not Chance.
He made us great and small ;
But being made, ’tis Circumstance
That finishes us all.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

YOUNG Captain Hamilton's departure, and what might come of it, were subjects of free discussion at the Pollocks' luncheon-table the following day. Mabel and Mr. Burgoyne had been to see Frances in the morning, and as Mabel was still tearful about her brother, and Percy still grew pallid when the matter was mooted, Mrs. Pollock's warmest sympathies were roused.

"What a pity they could not have been married some way or other before he left. Poor Miss Geneste ! I never pitied anyone half so much before ; did you, Percy ?"

"Never !" Percy replied, curtly.

"They made up their minds to be married on

Sunday night, and then something altered—oh! I know, the orders came—that was it, wasn't it, Percy? and Claude had to give up the idea, and Leo was half distracted," Mabel explained in ignorance of the debates on the marriage question which had been held between father and son.

"And how does she bear it now?"

"Oh! she has been overexcited, and now the reaction has come. Leo always was rather strange. I never knew she was so desperate about Claude till he went. Now she says, if she forgets him for one hour while he is away that she shall feel as if the curse of bloodguiltiness was coming upon her. I suppose Claude said a good deal to her before he left about not being flighty. It's rather a risk to leave a girl like Leo for five years. I will not say she is a flirt—that is not the word for her—but she is something very much like it."

"That is talking treason," Percy protested.

"No, it is not," Mabel argued, earnestly.

"Papa used to say long ago, before Claude fell

in love with her, that Leo was just like her mamma—

“The sort of woman women dread,
Men fatally adore.”

“Let us be walking home, Mabel,” Percy said, hurriedly; “and look here, pet, don’t go out half way to meet trouble for your brother. Let us hope no one will fatally adore her but himself. How is your sweet guest, Miss Dennet, Queenie?”

“Well, I believe, busy as usual with the children.”

“And how is Pollock?”

A slight shadow fell over Mrs. Pollock’s lovely face as she replied—

“He looks harassed; but he never complains to me.”

And with the memory of that shadow on his mind Percy walked back to Penge heartily hating his brother-in-law.

“That poor young man,” Miss Dennet was good enough to observe, when the news was told to her—“that poor young man! where

will he be if some one else comes along while he is away."

"I cannot think any evil of her," Frances replied.

" 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,' " Miss Dennet said, almost snappishly; "her worthless beauty is what it is to many others, a snare."

As she said it she really believed that she herself would have abstained from being snared in such a way, had the option been given her—a form of self-deception that is comforting when the alternative of beauty is beyond us.

Long ago, even before those days when Godfrey Pollock had first dawned upon the Dennet horizon in the guise of a commercial redeeming angel, Clara had given up attempting to take any sort of stand on any personal attributes. When the "brook and river" first met; when she was merging from childhood into girlhood, it is true that the germs of the feminine flower of vanity were in her. But they died out for want of sustenance. She learnt the truth,

and learnt it speedily, that it would be by dint of something very different to that which tided most young girls buoyantly over that period of life, that she would make for herself any place that might not readily be filled in her little world. She saw many of her young companions win and keep what was very precious to them, by means of nothing higher than a dimpled cheek, a glittering smile, or a soft, sweet voice. She had none of these gifts. The truth told itself to her when she looked in the glass, and when she looked abroad in the world into men's faces. These latter were not wont to be set kindly towards her, for her want of beauty was not softened by any of that tender graciousness which sometimes redeems even an ugly face. So she determined to be useful, and sensible, and always to do her obvious duty. And she had adhered to this determination, and made herself of some account at last.

She was made of very hard materials, this woman. Narrow in her views as to what was meet, right, and the bounden duty of every one

who fell under her observation ; pitiless in her judgment of those who in any way fell short of such views. To a certain degree she was justified in thus testing people in her own crucible, for she was eminently consistent in theory and practice. She always declared she would fulfil obvious duties, and she always did fulfil them. She acted according to her lights without swerving. But, on the other hand, it must be stated that as she never looked beyond, or saw what was not well on the surface, she neglected many a delicate duty which required keenness of perception, kindness of heart, and consideration for others, to enable any one to see and perform.

She was made of very hard materials—soul and body seemed to be composed of the same elements. It was a question that would present itself for consideration to the minds of those who knew her, whether the soul had influenced the formation of the body, or the body that of the soul. There was a perfect propriety and fitness in their union—both were hard, uncom-

promising, unsuggestive to an extraordinary degree. The casket was quite worthy of the jewel, the jewel of the casket; both were formed out of hard, ill-favoured materials—both showed their hardest side to Leonie Geneste.

Miss Geneste, it must be admitted, had been guilty of making an ill-advised remark concerning Clara Dennet. She had said of that lady in casually mentioning her to Mabel, "Poor thing! poor thing! I pity her!" And when Mabel had asked, "Why?" Leonie had replied, "For being so plain!" This remark Mabel had repeated to Percy; and Percy, who was keenly sympathetic to its half unconscious subtle sarcasm, had carried it on to his mother. When once such words were made known to Mrs. Burgoyne, they speedily made to themselves wings, and flew into unsafe places. Mrs. Burgoyne told them to her daughter, giving the words literally, but putting in a tone of satire that had been lacking when Leonie said them; and one of Mrs. Burgoyne's intelligent little

grandchildren heard them, and told them to Miss Dennet.

The woman had known all her life that she was plain—that it was not given to her to win by beauty. She had accepted the situation, and never seemed to think that it was a specially hard one; but all the while she had the womanly instinct of aversion to the fact being put before her by other women. She had brought herself to feel that there was a certain amount of justice (though no mercy) in the manly decree which awarded to her no higher power than usefulness in her generation. The fairest in the face always win, she believed in the eternal battle that goes on between the weak and the strong; but she did resent with a passive deep resentment that other women should seem to take it for granted that she was not as they were; that she could never know any of the flowers of existence; that flattery and soft words and looks, and gentle touches from thrilling hands, could never be hers. Indirectly she had often known herself to be a subject of

pity to her more highly favoured compeers. But the bald truth had never reached her so directly as now, when little Miss Pollock came and told her that pretty Miss Geneste called her "Poor thing, and pitied her for being so plain."

It has been said that the materials of which this woman was made were hard, very hard ones; and it is a further fact that her historian did not like her at starting, and likes her less the more she is analysed. Nevertheless, it is but fair to state that she did soften at this—softened unto tears when the child went away and left her. Her feeling for beauty in any form was weak and undefined, even if it existed at all; indeed, a genuine feeling for beauty would have beautified by elevating her face. She was the sort of woman to whom a gorgeous summer sun meant tan and weariness only; to whom the choicest lines, the fairest proportions, and the subtlest tints and combinations in art, meant cold marble and "something to hang upon the walls," nothing more. Yet for all

that she did realize from the repetition of that speech that the most gracious gift that can be bestowed upon the daughters of men is beauty. She tried hard to despise the girl for the frivolity and vanity which had dictated the words; but for all that the strong truth which made itself felt through the vanity and frivolity crushed down upon her, and made her soften unto tears of sorrow for herself, and spite against Leonie.

She did earnestly hope that the day would come when the beauty Leonie wore so bravely would be felt by its possessor, and seen by the rest, to be the worthless thing it was by the side of that steady pursuance of obvious duty, which Miss Dennet made the mistake of imagining to be integrity of purpose. There was no plan in the vague scheme of revenge which she hoped to see realized. In a rambling sort of way she arranged that, in the end, she should be seen and acknowledged to be superior to Leonie Geneste; though this might not be the case until the youth of both was well over.

But soon matters claimed Clara Dennet's undivided attention ; and it seemed to be her obvious duty to concentrate all her energies on the affairs commercial and domestic of Mr. and Mrs. Pollock.

In those days there arose a panic in the City—a panic so terrible that many of the oldest banking and mercantile houses were shivered like glass, though they had been thought to be founded upon rocks. It happened that the bank in which Mr. Pollock's capital was lodged at home, and the two houses to which his largest consignments were made abroad, fell to pieces simultaneously ; and Mrs. Burgoyne awoke one morning to the knowledge that she had bound her daughter over to a plebeian alliance for not even the good end of a comfortable maintenance. The old established bottle-making business came to a sharp, sudden, crashing end ; and Godfrey Pollock came out from the ruins with nothing beyond a reputation for fair dealing and two hundred a year, which he had settled on his wife.

On his wife! How the unfortunate man regretted that she was his wife, as he thought of that royal, large, luxurious loveliness of hers which had won him. She seemed only fitted to tread upon soft carpets, and wear soft raiment, and be generally softly entreated by circumstances. There would be little pity and sympathy expressed or felt for him by the Burgoynes when they knew that he had taken their flower to plant her in the penurious paths of life. Again, more bitterly than before, he regretted that he had not sought a wife for himself from amidst his own people. He might have had one, had he been wise, who would have been a helpmeet for him in poverty as well as in wealth. Frances had been in place amongst his pictures and statues, his rare bronzes, and the other evidences of that refinement which he had created in a measure in himself by dint of most careful and unceasing cultivation. She had been in her right place amongst these things; they all, as it were, led up to her more perfect beauty. Now he should have to place her where

the surroundings would jar not only upon her, but upon the sense of the fitness of things of all who looked upon her. He was a very miserable man, as these thoughts would arise to give poignancy to pain in the first hours of his ruin.

He did not make his first confidence to his wife. With a stubborn, obtuse want of discrimination, he resolved upon making the useful Miss Dennet the medium of his communication to Frances. And she accepted the task, never once thinking that it behoved her to urge him to go to his wife with his trouble—accepted the task; and because conventionality called it “unpleasant,” believed that she was performing a duty at no inconsiderable sacrifice of personal feeling.

Her calculations, the speeches she arranged, and the words of counsel which she intended to offer to Mrs. Pollock, were rendered of no avail by the manner in which that lady replied to her introductory remark—

“My cousin Godfrey has commissioned me to break some very bad news to you, Mrs. Pollock.”

When she began her speech Mrs. Pollock had been sitting at the piano, lazily and softly trying over the air to which some words of Percy's had recently been set. There had been something inert in her attitude, something languishing and lazy in the atmosphere about her. The gorgeous restfulness, which was one of the chief characteristics of her beauty, was about her very strongly this day. Miss Dennet told herself bitterly, when she commenced speaking, that this modern Dudu would hear the tale of her husband's ruin with a shamefully placid indifference.

But, before the last word was well spoken by Miss Dennet, that lady was made to feel the vanity of all earthly expectations. Mrs. Pollock ceased playing and stood up at once, rearing her golden-crowned head above the level at which Miss Dennet habitually looked.

"I will hear it from my husband himself," she said, lifting her hand with a gesture of command that an empress might have used ; and then a little of the sleeping woman, lulled to lethargy so long, came out—

"You have made me seem of no more use in his house than that," (she waved her hand towards a statuette of the Venus of Milo as she spoke); "you have shown him well the difference there is between us—you have come between my children and myself—but you shall not force me into a confidence with you about his troubles. I will hear the bad news from my husband!" And then she swept out of the room, leaving Miss Dennet to the making of very fervent resolutions never to trust to appearances again.

Mrs. Pollock had no intention of taking the man she had married at a disadvantage—of playing the part of outraged wife, now that he had fallen upon evil days! But if adversity had come upon him, she could more gracefully refuse to submit to intervention than if he had continued in prosperity. So now, very much to his surprise, about five minutes after he had despatched Miss Dennet on her mission, his wife swept into the room where he sat, chewing the cud of his many miseries.

Her step grew eager and her face grew flushed as she approached him. She looked younger, he thought, than she had looked since her marriage. There was a magnitude about her—a generosity of warmth and colour and proportion that made him feel himself elderly and dwindled, and of no account before her. Then she was by him, bending slightly over his shoulder, on which she rested her hand so graciously, and saying—

“Miss Dennet said something about ‘bad news,’ Godfrey, and so I came to you at once.”

“Clara has not told you, then?” he asked, leaning forward to rest his elbow on the table, and cover his eyes with his hand.

“Of course not,” she replied, sitting down by him. “I will not add to any misfortunes that may befall you by forgetting that I am your wife, and hearing, what I should hear from you alone, from a stranger.”

“We should wrong her affection for us and ours by regarding her as that,” he said; and Frances answered—

"It was not to talk of her I came. Tell me your trouble, Godfrey—that I may share it."

He did tell her then without hesitation, and she listened to the telling without interruption; but when he was midway through the story she just put her hand out and rested it on his—and the action gave him less comfort than a feeling of remorse that he should have formed another ideal in his mind of this woman—an ideal which he could not shatter all at once.

"How happy we ought to be even under it all, that our children are not old enough to feel any change?"

"They are not too young to suffer by it in reality," he said, moodily.

"Let us hope the suffering will be more in superficial seeming than in reality," she said, cheerfully. "By the time the serious business of their education commences, we may be able to do as we would wish by them. Of course, we shall leave this soon?"

"How will you like that?" he asked, almost bitterly. "How will your brother and your mother feel when they see me taking you away to something far lower than what they ever thought good enough for you."

"I hope they will feel it no more bitterly than I shall. Mamma cannot feel more keenly for me than I do for my babies."

"And they will still have the benefit of Clara's instruction," he said, somewhat constrainedly.

"Will she live with us still?" Frances asked; and he replied—

"Yes. I should not feel justified in depriving my children of every privilege, even if I could forget what we owe her, and cast Clara adrift."

At that Mrs. Pollock rose up, looking a trifle sadder than she had looked while listening to her husband's bad news.

"I will not waste more of your time," she said; and now she neither called him "Godfrey" nor did she put her hand, as she had previously

done, reassuringly on his shoulder. Then she went away, to think about many things—amongst others, about what she already owed, and what she might further owe in the future, to Clara Dennet.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. BURGoyNE LOQUITUR.

A RUMOUR, vague, but sounding terribly in their ears despite its vagueness, reached the Burgoyne through the medium of their servants, of something bad having happened at the Pollocks. "Something has gone wrong, no doubt," Mrs. Burgoyne said to her son; "but it can hardly be anything of importance, or Frances would have let me know."

"I don't know about that; it may be of so much importance that it would put the idea of letting you know out of her head; anyway, I will go over and hear about it."

He did go over, and he did hear about it from Frances, and he did feel that for all his love for

his sister he was a very useless and unpractical brother for her just now. If he had only turned his life to better account, if he had only availed himself, forced the age to avail itself, of such talents as he did undoubtedly possess! he would have had something different to this bitter consciousness of insufficiency as he looked at Frances, and heard her speaking of projected changes, the unpleasantness of which she by no means appreciated yet. He had it in his heart, and almost on his lips several times, to say to her, "In a short time you and your children shall have a home with me;" but he restrained himself, not feeling sure of what Mabel would say on the subject, and the home, the only home he would have to offer his sister would be his by right of Miss Hamilton.

Moreover, heartily as he disliked his brother-in-law, and lightly as from the bottom of his heart he believed Mr. Pollock now held his wife, Percy felt that there would be something mean, something bordering on cruelty almost, in sounding ever so slight a note of separation

between them now. He must have a tremendous business connexion, he will surely soon get something that will set him going comfortably, though not luxuriously like this, again. "My poor darling," the young man added affectionately, "you don't know how I despise myself for being the mere *dilettante*, the poor dreamer that I am, now that you need me, and I cannot serve you."

She smiled and shook her head. "No, no, don't wish that ; you have gained something that no panic can touch, and I can always fall back upon my pride in you when things go hardly with me ; whereas if you had gone into the City you might have been ruined too now ; don't reproach yourself, Percy, or wish yourself other than you are." Then as he rose to go away, she said, "Give my love to mamma, and tell her that I will come to her and talk it over to-morrow, and bid her not to distress herself about us."

"She cannot fail to do that about you !"

"She must try not to do it ; it will be like a reproach to my husband."

"One not quite undeserved," Percy exclaimed, intemperately.

"You shall not say so, Percy, for it is not true; one entirely undeserved in this matter. His commercial integrity is above suspicion."

"I am not talking about his commercial integrity."

"Then, as regards me, he has acted honourably up to his part of the bargain," Frances went on, more warmly than she had ever spoken before. "We have nothing to upbraid him with, Percy; his wealth has been liberally lavished upon me; in his poverty my family shall not blame him." Then she paused, grew cooler, and asked, "You are going to speak to him now, of course?"

"I will, if you wish it."

"I should wish you to do what you consider courteous and kind," she said; "if you think it would be either of these to go from his house now without speaking to him—do it."

"You are always right," he said, rather humbly; "you are always just what a woman should be, sweet and gentle, even though——"

he interrupted himself, and then went on—
“where is Pollock? I will go and see him at once.”

“In his study,” she replied, and to his study Mr. Burgoyne made his way.

The interview between the two men was brief, but not unkindly. Though he disliked Mr. Pollock, Percy was fain to admit to himself that that gentleman was bearing the blow manfully. They shook hands, and they agreed that it was a bad business, and Mr. Pollock said all the right things as to his regret for having been the means of plunging Frances into such a position, and Percy made all the right answers. Then it came to Mr. Pollock to feel that for all practical purposes he might as well converse on the subject of his business difficulties with his own youngest child as with his wife's brother. And it came to Percy to feel that he had been kind and courteous enough for that day.

“Make my best compliments to your mother,” Mr. Pollock said when his guest was departing, and Percy promised to do so, wondering the

while what his mother would think of Mr. Pollock's best compliments. Then Mr. Burgoyne went back to Penge, and then all the old autocratic spirit roused itself and would not be laid in Mrs. Burgoyne.

She was a woman who had all her life cultivated imperiousness of mind and manner as though it had been a special grace and virtue. She would lash herself up to a pitch of anger against insubordinate inferiors by the reiteration to herself of the statement that she was the wife of a Burgoyne and the daughter of a Boileau. During the lifetime of the first-named gentleman she had been wont to take her stand more especially upon her origin ; but after General Burgoyne's death her marriage became of inestimable service to her.

"This would have been heart-breaking if she had been matched with a gentleman ; but as it is——"

"As it is, he's not less of a gentleman than when he married her," Percy interrupted. He did not like to remind his mother that the match

had been of her own making ; but he was a man, and so was just a trifle more just to the fallen than an irate woman could be ; therefore he said, “ he is not less a gentleman than when he married her. It is no use taking that tone about the match now ; unfortunately we can do nothing to really help them, but we can avoid reviling them for what they cannot help.” Then he gave his sister’s message to her mother, pouring it in as oil upon the troubled waters of that lady’s spirit. But Mrs. Burgoyne was by no means appeased.

“ She will come and talk it over, poor thing ! —poor girl ! I do hope that Mr. Pollock will show that he has not lost his respect for all that is right by coming over to me about it himself.”

“ That is expecting a good deal of a man under such harassing circumstances as Pollock is placed in, mother ; he is not likely, I should say, to go out of his way to make talk that will not aid him at all about it.”

“ It is due to me that he should pay me so

much respect," the old lady said, severely. Then she made up her mind that she would not be defrauded of so righteous an opportunity of making Mr. Pollock feel himself to be a sinner and an ingrate. If he did not of his own accord come to her on the following day she would send such a mandate as would surely bring him. He was in a position now "to be told the truth," she said; and though she did not say the words "with impunity," it is to be feared that she was ungenerous enough to think them.

Some memories of her old days of regimental rule—some, till now forgotten, acts and influences that had tended to make her the exacting tyrant she was—must have swept across Mrs. Burgoyne's mind, and swayed her to a certain extent on the following morning. She astonished her parlour-maid by breakfasting in her dressing-room, reclining regally amongst a lot of cushions, with a Cashmere shawl thrown around her, and a lot of Indian jewels disposed about her person after a fashion that had been familiar to her in the days of her highest pomp

and vanity. She wanted to recall her old self in full force, and she strove to do it in the unreasonable but still subtly successful way women have of touching up old memories with old gauds.

At heart she was sincerely grieved for her daughter, and for the little grandchildren, who possessed divine traces of the Burgoyne refinements. But high above this grief rose her wrath against her son-in-law, not for his downfall, but for that placing of one of the women of his own family on a par with Frances, which seemed to Mrs. Burgoyne a more guilty act than it was in reality. Her wrath had been growing against him for a long time, for her face had ever been steadily set against Miss Dennet, and Miss Dennet had ever stolidly disregarded the fact in a way that led Mrs. Burgoyne to surmise that Miss Dennet must receive at least tacit support from Mr. Pollock. Now existing arrangements would in all probability be dashed to pieces in the throes of this miserable mercantile convulsion. But for all that probability,

Mrs. Burgoyne resolved to say her say as to what she had thought of them—to ensure Miss Dennet immediate dethronement, if possible, and send her away defeated—and generally to “kick when she dare.”

Her daughter came according to her promise, looking so magnificently beautiful with all the evidences of refinement and wealth about her, that Mrs. Burgoyne’s wrath rose higher than ever against the man who would soon be unable to supply them to his wife. “I am indeed unfortunate — singularly unfortunate in my children,” she said, considerately. “You were sacrificed for the bettering of Percy’s prospects, as we thought at the time, and now it has come to this with you, and Percy is going to drift into matrimony with a girl who has not brains enough to see that she is a nuisance to him, or pride enough to let him go if she did see it.”

“I know you misjudge Mabel, and I hope you misjudge Percy, mother ; as for myself, I cannot permit any one to speak of my marriage as a sacrifice ; I have been wrong ever to let such

words pass. I should be a traitor to my husband to listen to them now."

The heroine of a hundred fights, the victor in many a pitched verbal battle, looked at her young opponent in amazement. It was the first time in her life that Frances had ever stood up, so to say, against her mother. Mrs. Burgoyne picked up the gauntlet as soon as her surprise allowed her to do it, with the words—

"Perhaps you still think that I misjudged that woman—that Miss Dennet—when I told you she was a nasty, designing, treacherous thing; was I right or wrong then?"

"I think you were right, mamma; but I did not come to talk about Miss Dennet," Mrs. Pollock replied, as the carmine flush of a most bitter mortification spread over her face. "Heavy, real trouble has come upon us: trifles light as air have lost their power to vex me."

"That woman's conduct is not a trifle light as air, Frances."

"Do not let us talk about her, mamma; I have so much to consult you about. Godfrey

wants to sell the place and the chief part of the furniture directly almost, and he has asked me to select such things as will be fitting and enough for a small house and a narrow income; you can help me."


Mrs. Pollock told a story in saying this; but if ever the motive redeemed the means, the redemption was wrought in this case. Mr. Godfrey Pollock had requested his cousin, Miss Dennet, to make the selection, and Frances had then boldly come forward, declaring "that she would take that upon herself, and save Miss Dennet trouble." So now she made no mention of this slight which had been offered her, to her mother, for she did desire earnestly that all tolerance should be shown to the man she had married in this hour of his adversity.

Mrs. Burgoyne was very willing to talk, and to suggest, and to advise, and generally to keep the full painfulness of her position well before her unfortunate daughter. "He will have to take you to live in London, I suppose, and London will be sure to disagree with you."

“Oh, no ; my health is very sound. Last year, mamma, you were very desirous of our taking a town house.”

“At Hyde Park Gate, not in some squalid square or back street, like you will have to live in now. Really, wretched as the pittance is, it would be better for him to give you up your settlement and the children, and leave you to get on as well as you can without him ; you would at least have a home with me !”

“Of course you are only in jest in making such a suggestion, mamma ; but it is hard for me to listen to such jests now. Wherever my husband goes I will go, and whatever fate is his I will share it.” She threw down her guard here, and spoke out warmly in her wounded tenderness for misfortune. “Wrong as I was to marry him, I should be trebly wrong to suffer any one to suppose I could even dream of leaving him now.” Then she felt that she had thrown down her guard, and that it would be well for her to go away and recover it before she listened o more of her mother’s words. So she got up



and kissed that lady, and could not help smiling, despite her sorrows, at the air of the Orient which Mrs. Burgoyne had contrived to create out of long-unused materials.

“ Good-bye, my dear ; give my compliments to Mr. Pollock, and tell him that I confidently expect to see him to-day. I am too completely shattered to get over to Sydenham ; but he will feel with me that we cannot meet too soon. I should not like those Hamiltons to know that he has shunned me ; it would have a bad appearance.”

“ If Godfrey has time he will come, I am sure ; but you must consider what he has to do—what a terrible weight of work without hope he has on his shoulders just now.”

“ He ought to find time to come to me,” Mrs. Burgoyne replied, calling all her imperiousness of tone and look to aid the words. To which Frances simply replied—“ I will tell him,” and was then driven away home.

In her anxiety that his dignity should not suffer in the eyes of her own family, she rashly

resolved to urge upon Mr. Pollock the desirability of his going over to see her mother at once. It would show them that he had a less guilty conscience than her mother and brother both seemed bent upon bestowing on him. "The crash will surely put Clara out of mamma's head," she argued; "she will let that odious subject alone for this day, at least; so it will be safer he should see her this day than any other."


Acting on this belief, she went home and delivered her mother's message, adding the words—"Do go, Godfrey; it will please her, and we will keep as much good-will as we can amongst us, will we not?"

"Mrs. Burgoyne is exacting, as usual: I must go to-day?"

"Unless you have something to do. It will be better for you than sitting here alone thinking."

He did not tell her that he had only been "sitting alone thinking" during the last five minutes. Before that, Miss Dennet had been in talking to him—talking cold, clear, reasonable

talk about what it would be well for them all to do in the future. There had been nothing said between them that a third person, even if that third person had been Mrs. Pollock herself, might not have heard them say. Still he shrank from telling his wife about the consultation, knowing well that she would feel, and feel rightly, that she should have been the one consulted. Yes, there had been one point in the conversation which would perhaps have caused Mrs. Pollock's ears to tingle if it had reached her. Mr. Pollock had said, "You will be with us, I hope, Clara? You will share our fallen fortune, as you would our brighter one, had it lasted?" To which invitation Miss Dennet had responded—"Thank you, Godfrey; while I can serve you or your children I shall be found close at hand, however much Mrs. Pollock may wish me away, and however openly she may show her wishes." "There is every allowance to be made for Frances," he said, hurriedly; and Miss Dennet answered—"Yes; she has been brought up in a very bad school;" and believed herself,



as she spoke, to be superior to Frances in every Christian virtue.

Mrs. Burgoyne had waxed very impatient by the time Mr. Pollock got himself over to call upon her. He went over as became a man whose condition had been what his had been—went over on a blood mare, with a groom behind him on a stately stepper, whose action was so impressive that it induced the inexperienced to believe the man better mounted than the master. There were no signs of fallen majesty about Mr. Pollock as yet: the crown and sceptre does not look battered and worn the day after de-thronement.

Mrs. Burgoyne had waxed very impatient, almost waspishly so; for it had occurred to her as well within the bounds of possibility, that she might have dressed the situation and raked up thoughts of her old rule for nothing. In reply to his rather stiff, but perfectly courteous, "Good morning, madam," as he came in, she said, holding out her left fingers to him the while—

"Excuse my rising; I am completely overcome by this most terrible affair."

He bowed a stiff bow of recognition of her sentiments, and then, in perfect good faith, he made an awkward attempt to give her some solace.

"It may be a comfort to you to hear me say that Frances is in no way to blame for having contributed to my ruin; it has come from outside. My purely domestic affairs are in perfect order."

"I should never have felt my daughter to be to blame, whatever her expenditure," Mrs. Burgoyne retorted, quickly; "she had the right to conceive that even lavish expenditure would not be extravagance. You excused one whom no one in his or her right senses would dream of accusing in excusing Frances."

"I suppose you are right; I need not tell you how deep my regret is for her—almost entirely for her—at this fatal change."

"It should be so; indeed, Mr. Pollock, it cannot be too deep. It will plunge us all—it

will plunge me in a peculiarly painful position. She is a Burgoyne, and the Burgoynes and Boileaus will demand a strict account of the way I have held my trust."

He knew that this was a bit of mere idle, boastful talk, all this about the Burgoynes and the Boileaus demanding strict account of the way in which the disappointed old match-maker had disposed of her daughter. Still, idle and boastful as he knew it to be, it annoyed him.

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And at that—that openly-expressed regret that Frances was his wife—the wrath which Mrs. Burgoyne had been carefully cultivating against her son-in-law for a long time culminated.

"You might have spared me the insult of putting the idea which has been in your heart for long into words now," she began. "'Unfortunately,' as you say, 'nothing can do away with the fact of her being a Pollock,' unless either of you grow less careful."

"Either of whom?" he asked.



"Either you or that woman whom you have brought to my daughter's house to outrage my daughter's feelings."

"You are raving," he said, coolly, "or some one has been raving to you. Has your daughter declared her feelings to be outraged by me or mine?"

"She has not; she is a Burgoyne; she would scorn to complain."

"She is not a Burgoyne—I had to correct that statement before; she is Mrs. Pollock, and I will take care that the dignity of Mrs. Pollock is not outraged."

He felt mean-spirited, even as he uttered these high-spirited words, for he remembered Mrs. Pollock's expressed aversion to having Miss Dennet to live with them, and his own promise to the latter lady that she should do so.

"Then you will turn that woman out of your house?"

"What woman?—there are many women who will leave my house. My establishment will very soon be broken up."



"The woman I mean is not called a servant," Mrs. Burgoyne answered; "I do not know what to call her——"

"By her name," he interrupted; "it is unworthy of you to attack the absent with bitter words and bitterer inuendo; the meanest in my house has a name. Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of the meanest in your house," the old lady cried, quickly. "You can name her to yourself without my defiling my tongue by pronouncing her name." Mrs. Burgoyne paused in her triumph to take breath, and then resumed (forgetting, after the manner of women, what she had just uttered relative to "defiling her lips"). "I mean your cousin, Miss Dennet. In this pass to which you have brought my daughter, I feel that I have a right to demand a sacrifice of you; I will only ask such a one as your honour should have called upon you to make long ago; do not any longer insult my daughter by allowing that woman to live under the same roof with her."

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"You are very kind, madam," he said, bitterly, and then he bowed to her once more, and went away home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GREVILLES AGAIN.

LONG before the affairs of Mr. Pollock were finally settled, and he free to retire into uncomfortable obscurity, out of sight of all such as had claims on him, Captain Hamilton began to grow uneasy as to the hue of Leonie's cheeks. The girl was getting "pale and thinner than was well in one so young," and in his heart the kind old man, who was like a father to her, could not bring himself to feel that this change was wrought by a heart-wearing anxiety about his son. Claude wrote her loving, desperate, almost despairing letters from every port at which they touched. He told her how he knelt to her portrait, saying his prayers to it, and for its ori-

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Does any one really bend the knee in genuine homage to the queen of the south coast bathing-places in her proper season? It may be that some people do so, and are right from every reasonable point of view in doing thus. But to me she is so much more divine when she is destitute of the health or gaiety-seeking humans, who air "their monstrous heads" on the pier diurnally after bathing. Brighton out of the season, dull and empty, and in general disarray, is delightful for many reasons. Amongst others may be mentioned these, that you can take your walks abroad without having to nod your head off, and express little delights and surprises which you do not feel at meeting people you know and wish you did not know, and you can ride to the Devil's Dyke and not see the eight counties which are pointed out to you, and without meeting a riding-master convoying countless young ladies who are all perilously addicted to the near sides of their saddles, and to giving their horses comic little cuts on the off flank when they desire them to exhibit that exciting compromise between a curvet and a *pas de*

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fascination, which Brighton horses are wont to practise on the Parade.

The invitation to go to Brighton with them had been a very opportune one for Miss Dennet. Matters had come to a crisis in Mr. Pollock's household—the establishment was broken up, and the heads of it dispersed for awhile. Frances and her children were staying with Mrs. Burgoyne until Mr. Pollock had decided on a definite course. It was open to him to commence business again in a small way on a sum which a capitalist friend offered to advance to him, or to go into a commercial house in an utterly different line as a second clerk. It was an important matter to him — so important a matter, that he would not come to a decision about it in rash haste. Accordingly, while he was weighing the respective advantages of both paths, his wife had a period of peace at Penge; and Miss Dennet would have been homeless for a few weeks if Miss Hamilton had not invited her to be their guest at Brighton.

There had been an unpleasant scene between

Mr. and Mrs. Pollock after that interview which has been chronicled, which took place between Mrs. Burgoyne and her son-in-law. Mr. Pollock told himself, as he rode home, that by every law of justice, honour, and kindness, he was compelled to say such words to his wife in vindication of his cousin as should save the latter from a repetition of the suspicions with the utterance of which Mrs. Burgoyne had offended him, or at all events, from such suspicions being worded. He told himself that it would be a mean abrogation of his own dignity and authority, as lord over his own house and his own wife, if he suffered Mrs. Burgoyne to dictate terms to him. Miss Dennet had a heavy claim on his gratitude—she had loved him! which his wife had never done. After remembering this, he went in with the determination he had expressed to Mrs. Burgoyne more firmly fixed than ever—"So long as he had a roof to cover him, Miss Dennet should find a home under it."

It was a rare thing for Frances to go to meet him when he came home. The terms of

their union had always been felt and carried out by both parties ; and nothing but those well-understood terms had been expected on either side. All through the years of prosperity Frances had never brought herself, and never thought of bringing herself, to feign an atom more than she felt. But now, in his adversity, she cultivated each kindly feeling as it arose towards him, until it culminated in some kindly act, which would have lacked reality the other day, but which was genuine enough now. So on this occasion she went out to the hall door to meet him when she heard him coming up the drive ; and stood there a glorious type of young matronhood in the glowing afternoon light, when he pulled up.

“ Shall we take a turn through the laurel walk ? There will be time before dinner, Godfrey,” she said, as he came and stood beside her, and he gave assent ; and Miss Dennet, looking out from an upper window, marked the pair, and marvelled what such an unusual proceeding portended.

"Did you know why your mother wanted to see me?" he began, and she, not feeling quite sure as to whether or not she did know what her mother's reasons for desiring the interview had been, replied—

"Yes; mamma always does like people to do what she considers right towards her. She thought you ought to call upon her, and be consoled with, I believe." She tried to smile a sympathy and cordial understanding upon him as she made this mention of her mother's little foible. But Mr. Pollock was in no mood to be sympathized with and understood by his wife.

"I'm afraid you are prevaricating," he began, slowly. He was one of those men who vex the souls of those whom they feel called upon to censure by measured words. "I'm afraid you are prevaricating. Mrs. Burgoyne wanted to see me for a reason that you doubtless know of—a reason that is an offence to me—an unpardonable offence to me and mine. I am sorry that you had not more respect for yourself—even if




you had none for me—than to urge me to go and receive it.”

She had blushed warmly when he began, but by the time he had finished the colour had ebbed away again, and her face was as composed as he had ever seen it, as she bent her proud, pure, honest violet eyes upon him, and replied—

“I am sorry you should think so meanly of me. It would be sad, not only for us, but for our children, if we learnt to despise each other now, Godfrey. Try to believe the simple truth—if I had known that mamma contemplated saying a word that could have offended you, I should have urged you to stay at home, not have sent you there.”

“She has never discussed Clara with you, then?” he inquired.

“Yes.” Mrs. Pollock blushed again, and this time the colour did not recede quickly, but went on deepening as she spoke. “Yes; she has spoken of Miss Dennet frequently, but the subject has never been introduced or prolonged by me.”



"What subject?"

"The subject of Miss Dennet," Mrs. Pollock replied, curtly.


"Yet she is certainly not a subject that you need have shrank from introducing or shunned discussing. Now, Frances, we will have it out fairly. Why do you dislike Clara? Why does your mother malign her? All that you know of her—all that I know of her—all that any one knows about her is good, and redounds to her credit. Why do you set yourself against her?"

"I do not like her. Perhaps I am without a reason for my dislike."

"Perhaps you are without a reason! is the cultivation of such an unfounded prejudice just or reasonable, let alone womanly——"

"I think it is that," Frances interrupted. "Women's instincts are very acute in some cases, Godfrey, and mine bid me distrust Miss Dennet. I would not have said this if you had not forced me to say it."

"You would have added deceit to your uncharitableness."



"No ; I never feign to like her. But while it is your pleasure that your cousin should have a home with us, I would have spared you the knowledge that the sight of her is hateful to me ; but now you have gained that knowledge, and I do ask it of you earnestly that her home shall be with us no longer."

She put her hand upon her husband's arm as she spoke, and pressed it pleadingly in her eagerness. She slackened her hold as he answered—

"Do you remember the night my mother gave us Clara Dennet's letter to read ?"

"Well—too well."

"No—not 'too well,' for I want you to remember it ; you read it, and of your own accord you entreated that the writer of it should be invited to come and live with us. Her being here at all is your doing, not mine ; but as she is here she shall be treated as I desire, and she deserves ; it would be treating a defenceless woman too cruelly to let her go away from us now, shadowed by the horrible suspicions your mother

and yourself have chosen to garner up in your hearts about her. She has agreed to my request that she will still reside with us."


"Very well; I will not disturb you by any farther words about her—you have enough to worry you without that."

He was touched by his wife's remembrance of his great trouble; it was magnanimous on the part of a woman who had just been scolded. He tried to emulate her generosity.

"I thank you heartily, Frances; I wish I could accede to your request with honour."

"We will say no more about that."

She waved the subject off rather haughtily, but he was compelled to accept the manner of her dismissal of it, since he really had nothing more to say. One thing was certain, and satisfactory so far. He had shown that he was lord of his own wife, and in his own house. The Burgoyne influence, which might have grown rampant now that he had fallen on evil days, was laid in the dust by his energetic policy. So he went in to dinner, master of the position.



During the time that intervened between this conversation and the day of Miss Dennet's departure for Brighton, a series of stirring events kept Mrs. Pollock too actively employed for the adoption of a uniformly polite manner to Miss Dennet to be the strain it would otherwise have been on her civility. Still, she did seem to breathe more freely when Miss Dennet moved with her trunks to Penge, in order that "they might all start comfortably together in the morning," Mabel said.

There was no comfort to Leonie Geneste in an arrangement which brought Miss Dennet into their midst. She had, when the subject of the invitation was first mooted, ventured to say—

"Will you not find it a bore getting so very intimate with her? The Burgoynes don't like her, do they?"


"I do not mean Mrs. Burgoyne to choose my friends," Mabel replied. "And as for Percy, he hates every woman who is not pretty (he says they have no business to exist—so wicked!)—and I cannot go about the world searching for

lovely friends to please him. I think they are all very unjust to poor Miss Dennet," Mabel continued, with a judicial air ; " I tell Percy so."

" Which convinces him, of course," Leonie said, laughing. " Well, I am unjust to her too, for I don't like her ; and as I have no reason to give, I suppose I am unjust. Oh ! yes, I have a reason—her voice ! She undulates up and down her words in such fluctuating, affected tones, that she distresses my ears."

" Percy and you are both intolerably affected about what offends your ears and your eyes. I can't help you now, though, Leo ; go to Brighton with us she must."

And go to Brighton with them she did. Poor Mabel soon found that she was to be wounded by a dart taken from her own wing, as it were. The Nemesis which overtook Miss Hamilton for her want of humility in rejecting good advice, was of the closest kind. She, who had brought Miss Dennet upon them, was the one Miss Dennet selected to bore the most incessantly. She would be a bosom friend to Miss Hamilton



—she would bathe when Miss Hamilton bathed, and bare her sparse locks on the pier when Mabel let her golden tresses loose on the winds ; —she would, in short, have no Brighton existence apart from Miss Hamilton—a state of things to which Mabel was compelled to submit, because she knew herself to be the cause, and also because Leonie fell in with some friends, and was much absorbed in their society.

These old friends, a happy pair just home from their bridal tour, were Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Greville.

They met Miss Geneste and Captain Hamilton on the pier the night after the arrival of the Penge party ; and they stopped at once, evidently at the suggestion of the lady, who was gracious after a patronizingly affectionate fashion that is a favourite one with brides who have won, when they meet one whom they had shrewd surmises in the past rivalled them, or might have rivalled them. It delighted Mrs. Fred Greville to be able to show Leonie that Fred was happy and devoted, and willing to

carry a big shawl, that made him hot and uncomfortable, in case his wife might want it later in the evening. There had been a time—and that time was not so very long past either—when she would not for half her fortune have said what she did now, as soon as Captain Hamilton had been made known to them.

“Fred, you go on with Leo; you must have much to say to each other; and you will take care of me, will you not?” she added, turning to Captain Hamilton, and flashing her eyes and teeth upon him in what she had been in the habit of hearing called her “brilliant smile.”

Leonie made one little attempt to retain her hold of Captain Hamilton’s arm; but the bride was one of those high-stepping young women who make triumphant progresses through the world by dint of sheer physical force. She brushed Miss Geneste away to the side of Mr. Greville, and took possession of the place from whence she had swept Leo in a shorter time than it takes to write it. And then she looked smilingly satisfied with herself, as if she had

done something which proved her to be very superior to the weaknesses of the majority of wives ; and whispered to Captain Hamilton—

“ There was a little flirtation there, you know. So naughty of Fred, to presume on being engaged ; he knew he was safe.”

“ Was that his explanation ? ” Captain Hamilton asked, laconically.

And the bride laughed again (she laughed on very small provocation—her own wit, for instance), and replied—

“ Yes, young men will flirt, you know ; and I used not to care, knowing Fred so well. But they used to be great friends—see how they will look now. Listen.” Then she cried out—
“ What are you two talking about ? ”

And Captain Hamilton did gird against the circumstances which had put his cherished, refined Leonie in the position of “ seeming ” even to have rivalled this terrible woman, who stepped and talked high, and was generally overwhelming.

The Grevilles had the longest suite of rooms

in the best hotel ; they had obtained the nicest horses at the first livery-stables ; they were known at Mutton's, and on the Parade ; and were altogether making themselves free of Brighton in the best way. In their triumphant car they would insist on taking Leonie Geneste : the gentleman apparently for no other end than to show his cousin how entirely happy he was with his wife, and satisfied with his situation ; and the lady, because she had been very jealous of Leonie, and found it pleasant now to put the contrast in their positions well before the girl. Mrs. Greville had profound satisfaction in her own prosperity, and in having succeeded in marrying the man she had wanted to marry. But this satisfaction intensified itself when she met the daring interloper who had undesignedly shaken Fred's allegiance while it was still an honour that might be transferred.

But all these feelings were partially veiled under a semblance of such friendliness as rather overcame Miss Geneste's judgment at first. During that stroll on the pier on the first

night of their reunion Mr. Greville pronounced a warm panegyric on his bride—a panegyric so warm, indeed, that Leonie did for a moment think that her cousin's mind must be wandering, since he seemed to think it needful thus to cry aloud his reasons for being the happiest of men.

“I have achieved a brighter fate than I deserved,” he said, after mentioning several of Mrs. Fred's excellences. “I formed an ideal when I was a boy—and my wife realizes it. Few men can say that, I fancy.”

Leonie did not, in answer to this, say what it was in her heart to say—namely, that he had wandered considerably from his ideal to higher realities, and that few men would desire in maturity to realize their vague and generally weak boyish dreams. She contented herself with saying—

“I am heartily glad that you are so fortunate, and so fully alive to your good fortune, Fred.”

“I should, indeed, be insatiable in my craving

for happiness if I were not satisfied." Then he did wish in the innermost recesses of his heart that Mrs. Fred Greville would not laugh quite so loudly, and scatter girlish ejaculations of pleasure and admiration in the sea breeze, and for the sea view, quite so lavishly over the pier. Still he felt that it behoved him to make Leonie feel that such vivacity held a potent charm for him, since it was the chief characteristic of his wife. "Her light-heartedness and never-flagging spirits are a blessing to me. I am such a quiet man, that a quiet wife would have let me lapse into melancholy. I suppose Captain Hamilton is as lively and boisterous as all naval men are?"

"He is lively, but not a bit boisterous," Leonie replied, coolly.

And then they reached the end, and turned, and the two ladies got themselves together in some way, leaving the gentlemen to follow them—a movement on which Miss Geneste congratulated herself.

But she acknowledged, in a few moments,

that she had congratulated herself too soon. She had succeeded in changing her companion, but not the topic, which had made that companion almost unbearable. It seemed to her a sort of treason to talk to these people of Claude—of Claude, who was so infinitely superior to them in all that is true and thorough—and they would talk about him.

“You are not alone here with old Captain Hamilton, I understand?” Mrs. Greville began.

“No; Miss Hamilton is here, and she has a lady staying with her; and Mr. Burgoyne is to come to-night.”

“Are they going to be married soon?”

“Yes, very soon.”

“What a good thing. Really I am very glad to hear it. No one with any regard for a girl would entrap her or allow her to be entrapped into a long engagement.”

Mrs. Greville paused for a reply, and Leonie would not make one.

“I am your relation now, and a married

woman, so I am doubly privileged to speak candidly to you." The bride went on—"Fred and I are both so exceedingly interested in you, and we are so sorry for the way you're situated."

"Fred and you are both very kind ; but really your sympathy is misplaced," Leonie replied, flushing up brightly. She saw clearly towards what point the conversation was tending. Mrs. Frederick Greville had set herself the congenial task of "finding out" which of the parted lovers had delayed the marriage.

Mrs. Greville shook her head.

"My dear Leonie, it is no use ; it has told on you already. The young man should have released you, or married you, before he went away for that dreadful time."

"You may rest assured that Claude—Captain Hamilton—did what was best—did what both he and I thought best," Leonie said.

"I cannot think it ; neither Fred nor I can think it. As Fred says, by the time Hamilton comes back, Leo will be past her bloom."

"Fred is determined that my bloom shall not last long," Leonie said, laughing.

"Last long! Don't you call five years long? Well, you are a most extraordinary pair. I know I used to think it a life time if Fred was away from me for five weeks; but then he was one in a thousand—so devoted. I am a very fortunate woman; for he is equally devoted now. It is not often a girl can say that of such a lover as Fred was."

The lady told her story with a daring, unblushing effrontery that staggered Miss Geneste. For many reasons she was glad that Mrs. Fred Greville had such a bad memory for the independence demonstration which Fred had made on her (Leonie's) account. Miss Geneste thought it would be justifiable to turn this vein of audacious self-gratulation to the desirable end of keeping the conversation entirely in the Greville groove.

"He does indeed seem very devoted. He was telling me just now that he was singularly fortunate; for that you realized the brightest ideal

he had ever formed." ("What a poor thing it must have been!" Miss Geneste thought.)

Then Mrs. Frederick Greville tried to put a few finishing touches to the bright rendering of her fate which she had placed before Leonie. After all, she did remember that Fred. had been swayed almost out of his engagement to herself by this girl at her side, and the remembrance of the fact did sting her. This must be borne in mind in extenuation of that bitterness which urged her to say now—

"Yes; I have always been outspoken and frank, making no secret of my affection for him, and keeping other men very much at a distance. Fred has the most profound contempt for girls who flirt under the rose; he always told me when any one accepted attentions from him, which she knew he had no right to pay."

Mrs. Fred Greville stepped more elastically than before as she made this statement; and Leonie, not deigning to think that its lash was applied to her, answered—

"Surely he was never so mean?" To which Mrs. Greville made answer—

"Don't be frightened, dear. He never said anything but good of you." And Leonie had the satisfaction of feeling that Mrs. Greville chose to regard her as one who had been more sinned against than sinning in the annals of the all-conquering Fred.

"From dear successful spite we hope for ease,
Nor fail to punish where we fail to please."

When Captain Hamilton and Leonie went in that evening they found that Mr. Burgoyne had arrived, and that even the amiable Mabel was feeling Miss Dennet to be very much in the way.

"Percy does talk such nonsense," Miss Hamilton exclaimed, pettishly, following Leonie up into her bed-room; "he says that Miss Dennet's atmosphere is bad, and that she is as dangerous as 'a lie which is half a truth.' He says,

"That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,

But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight,'
as Tennyson writes."

Leonie smiled.

"What can I do to help you, Mabel? I can't take her off your hands, for she simply will not be taken off by me. Besides," the girl added, hotly, "I cannot endure her; and life is too short to pass any part of it in paying false civilities to such people—they only sting you and your dearest in return."

"Percy hates her," Mabel said, in perplexity.

"Let him hate her."

"Ah! that's all very well for you to say; you have not got her here, and so do not feel responsible about her, as I do. Besides, I am not going to let Mrs. Burgoyne think she can weed my list of friends, even through Percy."

"Well, dear!" Leonie asked, patiently, "what does it all come to? We know that Miss Dennet is here, and we have agreed that she must be treated well, and we thoroughly understand that such treatment must come from us all—but specially from you—because you brought her upon us; you had better go down and keep things smooth."

"Come down with me?"

"Well, to tell the truth, my cousins and the sea-breeze together have been too much for me," Leonie said, planting herself resolutely in an easy chair, and looking as if she meant to remain in it the whole night. "Moreover," she added, seriously, "I want to write to Claude—my letter must go to-morrow."

END OF VOL. I.

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